

OUT OF THE WOMB

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by

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Chapter One

TWO REFUGEES from the Russia of the Ochrana, Yellow Pale, and Cossack's knout sought relief from the strain of being Jews in a liberal, humanely christian and gentlemanly anti-semitic England in an act of sexual union and, some nine months later, I was born uneventfully, legitimate and unwanted.

My mother was a short, dumpy, ugly black hairs on chin and lip, myxoedemic skin, intensely religious, unhealthily moral, ever coveting her neighbour's goods, realist able to lick her weight in Gentile wild cats without extending herself. She lied, flattered, insulted, and conned the scum who wanted to put a knife in her back but didn't dare, to get food for her brood, because no one had bothered to tell her that only ninety-nine-point-ninety-nine per cent. of the human race are callous, unthinking, animals. Two of the things she did remain in my memory, despite the passage of the years, to torment as I lie between sleeping and waking and truth cannot be denied or hidden: the drumming up of trade for the third rate prostitutes who infested our streets, and the letting of rooms at exorbitant rents to those creatures and their clients. The memory of the long lines of men who stood outside Settles Street Labour Exchange waiting, shuffling their feet, blowing on their hands, bumming a drag from a fag, the fifteen-year-old sons and daughters spoiling for a fight, breaking shop windows, stealing, the long lines of women waiting to buy stale loaves of bread and poor cuts of meat, is also with me

despite the passage of the years, and recalling that I ate meat at least once a day I will accept torment and teach my children to kill those who deprive them and all children of food.

As a child I was taught to honour my father, etc., etc., etc., so that my days would be long upon the earth that, etc., etc., etc., and for my money, I have very little, this criminal nonsense is more dangerous than the Hydrogen Bomb. I could write that pater was a grand chap who loved the mater, paid his bills on the day they fell due, never touched up the third parlour-maid if the butler was present and was always praising Beverley Nichols and Godfrey Winn. My difficulty is that since I lack a talent for this kind of romantic nonsense I am forced into making a virtue of honesty and I can't change; I've tried, often.

My father was, he is to the great joy of the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance now dead, a tall, emaciated, whiner, who spent fourteen hours a day in bed recuperating from the strain of not trying to find work, who registered on all who knew him with the individuality of a studio posed portrait of a debutante. He was ready, and he sent the *Times* a letter in Yiddish saying so, to become a member of the House of Lords if it meant an end to being pestered with offers of work. He waited a week to hear from the editor and then, guessing that Yiddish was not one of the qualifications demanded for an editor by the *Times*, he got a friend to send them a translated version. I am including part of this masterpiece since it proves that the lack of desire to work for a living sharpens one's mind. "Der trubble mit govinments is dat dey iss udderstadding nutting frum nutting frum udder pipples. Dey must hask frum a mentsch wat iss udderstadding to spik frum pipples to pipples." A United Nations dedicated to

these principles should either improve the human lot pretty soon or get us blown up sooner. Since the second of these alternatives would solve all our problems any criticism of the grouse shooting, poo-pooing, haw-hawing, nonentities the Foreign Office selects should be declared high treason. I have ranged far in what was intended to be a brief pen portrait of a weak, work shy, man for whom I have no feeling. The lack of feeling remains but I now see that within that gaunt frame was a strain of idealism. His weakness, petulance and bumming, distorted and made comic although it was real, worthwhile and a justification.

Over the years my father's sexual needs and my mother's refusal to attend a Birth Control Clinic gave me a brother and sister. With the further passage of years the three of us learned to hate each other. Love is a very tender plant needing the manure of a separate bedroom, a large unearned income and a talent for hypocrisy, if it is to take root and mature. Allied to our hatred for each other was the envy we felt for children who got the sweets, chocolates and ice-creams, that should have been ours, since we were also children. There is an instinctive Socialism in all children and until their parents teach them the facts of life they live good lives. Fortunately the three of us were blessed with parents who couldn't be bothered with us and we remained Socialist until we started earning money.

My brother is now a highly respected Conservative Borough Councillor, with a bedroom of his own, an obese wife who has two jewellery shops and a pathological fondness for Apfel Strudel that should see him as an owner of two jewellery shops soon. Every Friday night she enters his bedroom and, after a check on their current account and a review of prospects in the

jewellery trade, they make love and forget current accounts and the prospects of the jewellery trade for a couple of minutes. He has also been blessed with two children, a pew in the local synagogue, a glass topped cocktail cabinet, a twenty-one-inch television set, two bathrooms, five bedrooms, two water lavatories and the promise of membership by the local Golf Club immediately the percentage clause—one Jew, no Negroes—and the Jew dies. When this happy event does occur, I am convinced he will remember his origins and not deny that some of his best friends are poor Jews. I should be lacking in fairness if I did not mention his habit of making donations to charity if promised publicity.

I rang my sister last week to let her know I proposed to etch her out in sulphuric prose. Her reply was typical and had me grinning “I shouldt vorry wat you say. I make uh goot liffig.” We had agreed that life would have been more pleasant if we had never met some five years before. I have not forgotten the treatise on “bugger you Jack I’m all right” she gave me then and I doubt whether I ever will. “Wat you giffing me ? We had snoked salmon mit salt beef in Commercial Road. So I lends him a few bob and he giffs me back a phunt, so wat ? You vant I shouldt knit fā uh schwartzer? Do me uh flavuh.” Like so many of our great thinkers my sister posed the question and then answered it. She is never at a loss and can be relied on to react to crises with a cool head and a keen awareness of what is best for Sadie. When she had an illegitimate child to a Canadian soldier who was killed at Dieppe, she faced up to the responsibilities of motherhood and farmed it out as soon as she was out of hospital. Today she lives in a luxury flat in a super area, respected as a good wife and mother who gives generously if there is

a profit to giving and never hides her dislike for Negroes.

Every house in our street had been condemned as unsuitable for human habitation ten years before. A group of rats protested at this discrimination. A kindly landlord tormented by his need to amass a large dowry for his daughter forced himself to let them at exorbitant rents. It is with pride that I write "our home was just that little more bug ridden than the others." A child needs something to give him distinction and make him stand out from the children of his neighbours if he is to become the honourable, upstanding, never thinking of reward citizen everybody kids himself he is.

Unlike the well fed sixties the hungry thirties gave us schools that did more than limit themselves to the turning out of semi-literate psychopaths. The Education Authority adapting to the troubled times altered this primary function of the primary school and allowed them to become centres for the distribution of vouchers that bought groceries or coal to the value of one shilling. Greasy, obese, fur-coated, do-gooding harridans distributed them twice weekly in the school hall. The way they did it and the pleasure that doing it in that way gave them still has the power to make me feel sick despite the lapse of the years.

The pleasure they got watching you bend the knee taught me a great deal about the do-gooder and his motives for doing good that has stuck. I know that the characters who prate about the dignity of man while aware that no Edison has as yet invented a way of being well fed while starving are making the kind of bad joke only the well-fed, power-seeking obscenities can make. I stood in line hungry and ashamed, sweating it out waiting for my turn to be reached and the voucher handed over, many times when I was a kid.

I'm standing in line tomorrow if I'm hungry. This time I'm going to show how grateful I am and kill the cow dishing out.

After school was over for the day I never missed a visit to the market a couple of streets away. These visits meant a great deal to me and were the one bright spot, in the lousy day that followed the lousy day, when I was a kid. I was always able to pinch a soused herring or a pickled cucumber if I kept my eyes peeled: I always did. I lived in Pell Street not Buckingham Palace. I knew that the smiling copper with the pleasant word for the well dressed, camera carrying, tourist was also the bastard who had a clip round the ear and a swift kick up the arse for the kids who hung round the market.

I owed my weekly bath to the kindness of an intensely religious, wealthy, founder of a chain of cut-price stores who had set up a fund to supply free baths for the children of poor, observing the ritual in all its stupidity, Jews. Every Wednesday afternoon my mother shot round to the local synagogue to pitch the tale and get her share of free tickets going. On Thursday I went to school with a piece of soap wrapped in a towel and if she could get round to it a change of underwear. I tried to miss the yobbos dropping in for the weekly scrum-over by going straight from school. Sitting among burping, belching, farting Irish dockers, Caftaned Hassidim and zoot-suited Lascars ignoring each other did things for my ego I didn't want done.

As a lad louts amused themselves at my expense calling me a Jew bastard, the killer of Christ, a dirty foreigner and throwing stones from a safe distance. I do not propose to harrow the feelings of my readers giving them a round by round description of the occasions. Countless tomes have been written describ-

ing the how of it. And the millions of words add up to a load of nothing I dont want to add to. You either stand up and fight back and get told off or you run away and live to run away another day respected by your elders, waiting for the Messiah to solve the problem. Both won't do anything to make anti-semitism less popular among the shiftless, psychotic, scum who need to hate, to live good lives. But the first will at least get you some free medical attention.

Chapter Two

ISH BIN uh yiddel mit uh fiddel und urreluh mit un bass geboren Issey Segal losing himsel in this moment of the evolution of man to ape, marching along, singing a song, head high in the clouds, laughing, while the drab, workhouse utilitarian, school building that had captured, imprisoned, moulded, childhood became with each moment of time passing, each step away, a memory never forgotten, never remembered awake. "You have failed to allow for the mass over energy that expresses itself as a variable of the energy over mass, Dr. Einstein." "The editorial board insisted on publication, Dr. Whitehead," "I regret I cannot dine with the Prime Minister on Thursday." I laugh sometimes remembering what a dreamy clot I was before life caught me by the braces and shook me into sanity. Most times when remembrance comes I swear and wish I had some pheno-barbitones.

By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Ministry of Education and the blah, blah, blahs accorded to me by the blah, blah, blahs I hereby declare, state, aver, that I. Segal was a willing and diligent pupil and understands simple arithmetic and the difference between right and wrong and all blah, blah, blah, blah. This is how after thirty years I remember the splurge of blahs the Headmaster gave me as a character reference. I remember the school caretakers parting gift much more clearly. One doesn't forget a clip on the ear that leads to partial deafness, ever.

The orthodox Jew anxious to meet Jehovah white

as driven snow—cutting things fine in business, a profitable bankruptcy, cheating his pals at Club Yash, for which the Rabbi gives dispensation at a fee—would not order a suit from a tailor who kept his workshop open on the Sabbath. This gave me a whole week-end to dream of the coming of the glory that was the opportunity to work for a sweat shop master tailor who would lead me through the jungle of Der Schneiderie into the millenium that is bags of poontang, lots of gelt and the shop of one's own. At our school, Samuel Smiles was compulsory reading for all the older boys.

From the moment that I stood in the doorway of the basement sweatshop which was to be my home for ten hours a day six days a week I knew that God was good, cared, and didn't think much of his handiwork down below. The place stank of squalor and defeat.

There were three felling hands, a presser, an under-presser, a machiner, an under-machiner and Mr. Cohen the master tailor, spitting, farting, scratching, doing their various jobs in a space an arms amputated Fatty Arbuckle would have had difficulty breathing in. The floor was littered with spit-sodden tailors' cuttings, the remains of cheese, saltbeef and egg sandwiches, broken biscuits, fag ends, used matchsticks, torn newspapers and a broken plate. The lavatory door was open and I could see an opened packet of Tampax on the cistern. Mr. Cohen looked up from his work and came over. "You iss der new shop boy," he said. I looked at the fat little man with the kindly eyes and the treble chin that covered his Adam's Apple and I felt a little better inside. "Yes, I am," I replied. He then took me round and introduced me to each worker in turn. The presser and machiner were on piece work and my introduction to them was just a calling out of my name by Mr. Cohen and a nod of their heads. I spent

a little time with the three felling hands finding mutual friends. The stench of their cheap scented, unwashed bodies made my nose twitch.

"He put 'is 'and right up my bleedin' skirt." "All the way?" Sadie answered this with a giggle. "You tink uh soot maks itself. Taks yurrs arbeiten schwear tsi machen uh goot schneider." Mr. Cohen felt the lapel of an order. "Tak dis luppel. Feel frum der stitchis. Smoof lak uh babbis touchus." Nat took a packet of Durex from his pocket. Waved it round so that nobody could misunderstand his meaning, and leered at Sadie as he said "Coming out tonight, Sadie. Gotta use em up. They're going stale with keeping." Sadie's, "I only use Tampax there, thank you," had the lot of us laughing and Sadie giggling guiltily. She was a widow with two married daughters older than Nat. "Fancy coming to the pittures with me tonight, Issy?" This from the drab Rosie who went to Mass twice a day and never stopped talking about her beautiful daughter at a Convent school struck me as funny and I got the stitch trying to stop myself laughing, and my "I'd like to but I'm skint" was a little high pitched. Her "You can pay me back Friday" left me either having to hurt her or, and I did the or and said "I'll meet you outside at 8 o'clock." I met her outside. She was five minutes late. She had to get one-and-sixes because it was a Greta Garbo film and the sixpence and shilling galleries were full. I had an ice-cream and a bar of chocolate on her during the big film. I slept with her that night. It was so strange, it was so funny feeling her. Her belly felt rough like leather. She cried a lot. I didn't enjoy it very much. Her daughter wasn't at a Convent school. She was asleep in the kitchen. I tried hard to pay her back for the cinema and the ice-cream and bar of chocolate but

she wouldn't take the money. I slept with her lots more times. She always cried during. She was thirty-seven years old and her husband had deserted her. I was just fourteen years and a couple of months the first time I slept with her.

The presser, under-presser, machiner and under-machiner always gave me a clip across the ear when I was slow or I misunderstood what they wanted in tailors' trimmings. They also called me names in Yiddish no Talmud Torah had ever taught. Nat was the worst of the bullying sods. He threw a heavy presser's iron at me the day after the Jewish shops in Berlin were destroyed. He had to show what he thought of Hitler and as a Jew he couldn't get a visa for Germany. I was also much smaller and half his weight. They all had, Nat most of all, much in common with the Magnolia Blossom You Awns who stand outside schools in small American towns spitting at the little coloured girls going in. All four have been dead for some years. I managed not to cry when I heard of their passing over. I did feel that it was rather ironic — an atheist could make something of it — that they should have died before the influx of West Indians into Stepney gave them a chance to show they were born persecutors of the weak, suffering unfairly because of their religion.

Mr. Cohen was a podgy, unkind man who swore at anyone too scared to swear back, cut wages when times were hard, swindled his workers for pennies, told us how lousy his wife was in bed and illustrated, swindled his customers wholesale, would have liked to interfere with young girls but was afraid, attended the local synagogue regularly to drum up business and pray, criticised the young for eating during the Black Fast but always went up to Lyons Corner House to get himself a good lunch on this day, and was a dedicated

craftsman. I would often leave what I was doing to watch his eyes filming as his soft, pudgy fingertips fondled the stitching of a lapel, altered the lay of a sleeve, rearranged the drape of a shoulder, and feel moved without knowing why.

I had only been working for Mr. Cohen for three months when the school caretaker called at my home to tell me the headmaster wanted to see me. I wondered who had told him that I had misused my last school year and the school lavatory and started to cry. My mother, older, wiser, keenly aware of the main chance saw that there might be something in it for her, ignored my tears and told the school caretaker "Dunnt vorry, I bring im." He accepted this and left with a second-hand pair of shoes at a knockdown price that gave her a two hundred percent profit. Her "maybe e vants tu giff yuh sumting. You iss nah uh Rotchchilt vat iss vantage nutting, maybe," and my remembering that they can't pinch you for pulling the pudden in private unless you obstruct some honourable citizen taking a lame, blind, poor, grandmother for her lot doing it, made me see that I must face my destiny without fear and find out what the old geezer wanted to see me about. Thank God that although mother was bang on the target 'as usual she wasn't making a profit on this one. I had been sent for because there was a good chance that I, an elementary school-boy, would be allowed to sit for the annual examinations on which the Local Authority drew for its junior clerks. This was a new innovation and it had only come about because a couple of the local councillors taking it for granted, as politicians have a habit of doing, that filling their pockets at the expense of the public benefited the public, had been nabbed and while the heat was on the other crooks weren't letting anybody

else's pound notes melt in their mouths. These jobs were the Everest of ambition for the wage slave in our manor. Being soft numbers that gave good pay, short hours, long holidays, pay during sickness, pension on retirement at sixty, security, status, and no short time whatever the season. I had a friend who won the hand of a widow only ten years older than himself and two thousand quid because he worked in the Borough Treasurers' office and the lady had a couple of businesses and needed a reliable bookkeeper. I would have kissed the headmaster if I hadn't known that he would send for the police and read me a lecture on the evils of young boys kissing old men to show their gratitude.

This was one of the few times in my life that I justified someone's faith in me and came through with flying colours. Since 125 of the 132 youngsters who sat were Grammar School students in their Matriculation year and I came third from the top, I was pretty proud of myself and I let everybody know it rather blatantly. I don't know what Mr. Solomons saw in me that made him feel I could do it. I never knew I had anything that every other yobbo with a big mouth didn't have. I still don't. He's been dead for some years now and I did cry when I heard. I didn't go to the funeral. I had a date with a girl who let you poke around for your company. I've done a lot of things in my forty-eight years that ought to make me blush with shame. This is one of the few that does whenever I remember, and I do often. Mother kindly, understanding always, said one day when she caught me crying in the kitchen, "So vat he dun sumting fuh you. Yuh vant sit praying fuh der old cucker." I threw a cup at her. I enjoyed the good hiding I got. I knew I had done the right thing.

I crowed with the joy that comes with finding oneself alive, tingling, every nerve-end vibrating with

happiness of being, when the letter from the Local Authority came. I strutted down the street forcing people to read it. Accepting their congratulations with a lordly wave of the hand. I knew, I had the letter to prove it, that life had only one side, a bright side. I knew if I worked hard I could become a Borough Treasurer, a Town Clerk, or a Chief Clerk, and no bloody Communist was telling me anything else. I had the proof in my hand and it began "Dear Mr. Segal." I ran into the local school and the Shammas laughed when I asked him to render up a prayer of thanks to the wonderful country that had given me this chance to be a somebody and I got down on my knees and I lifted up mine eyes toward the Lord and for the last time in my life I prayed believing in my prayer.

The divine purpose or the non-divine purpose—the reader must decide—has been tender with this poor sinner in bequeathing to him a psycho-somatic mic-turating mechanism only a robot could be happy with. I spent the night that augured day of deliverance from vassalage of a sweat shop trying to sleep, tossing, turning, emptying my bladder, often. Unable to rid myself of the fear that had made me micturate with unnatural frequency I got up at four o'clock and dressed. An envious friend wanting to show the steel of which friendship is forged had suggested "there's been a mistake: it's another Segal." A thorough search had shown that in that year of grace there wasn't a wide boy on the council named Segal, but failed to relieve my anxiety. "Mad man. Iss planty time: go eat sumthing: iss piece cak by machine iff yuh vant: iss mit fruit," reminded me that the Praying Mantis who was chairman of the Finance Committee had said "tell your son not to be a bloody fool," when mother had asked him if there was anything to be worried

about. Having, it seemed, had my millionth piss and felt a burning, tingling, pain in the tip I got a compulsion to polish my shoes, press my trousers, brush my jacket and iron my shirt. The family had spent a couple of hours the previous evening doing just this. Father brewing a pot of tea in the kitchen greeted his first born "be uh mentsch: iss onlee uh jop." "Lozah, schnorrer, du zie uh mentsch: gat uh jop" I screamed back. Throwing a plate, he ran out whining "Diss frum mein sun; I shoul'n't haff liffed tzi seen der day." "I'll leave home, break with the family, become a yock and marry a shiksa" I shouted as I ran from the house. Yesterday's muck still littered the pavements, two lascars were going back to the Seaman's Hostel after an all-night session, gamblers were staggering home from the open day and night speilers. I roamed the back streets killing time, pissing often and reading and re-reading that part of the letter that ran "please report to Mr. Holmes the Chief Clerk."

When I was young, afraid, needing something, anything, to cover my fear I would go to Tower Hill to listen to a party comrade with a lugubrious voice and a snappy taste in suits and women — he is now an ardent Roman Catholic — tell when come the millenium the clerk would let his daughter marry a dustman. I do wish that that sincere party member had met Mr. Holmes. He would have become a Roman Catholic that much sooner.

"Sit down son," the porter said as he took the letter. "I'll see Mr. Holmes gets it right away." It couldn't have been more than an hour of dying to spring a leak, watching the clerks apply themselves diligently to drinking cups of tea, listening entranced while they debated whether the Arsenal would beat the Spurs in the Cup, and he was back. His "He's a bit of a oncer,

but don't worry, he can't eat you — the council don't allow it" as he rapped twice on the door of Mr. Holmes' office showed that even if he did think he was Charley Chaplin he was a bad psychologist. Mr. Holmes was busy signing a letter when I entered. His first words — I shall always treasure them — were: "Your shirt is filthy, go home and change it." "I washed it yesterday. It can't be," I spluttered, thinking he was nuts. "I said your shirt is filthy, go home and change it." There was a nasty grin spotlighting his false teeth as he gave me the "I'm the boss, don't argue" tone this time. I got the point. He wouldn't have to ever repeat himself fearing I'd misunderstood. Mr. Holmes, an anti-semitic louse, angry because he had been forced to have a Jew in his office, giving me a workout to show he didn't like this affront to his authority. "Do I come back to report to you, . . . sir?" I still remember how I choked out "sir". "You'll see me." He was really menacing when he said this.

I didn't see why I should go home to change a shirt that was clean when I didn't have another as clean. I didn't tell him this. He was such a silly bastard, naturally I didn't want to give him an alibi for another outburst and spoil his record.

Mr. Holmes, standing by a desk, greeted my return: "I don't think you'll be much use." Then had the clerks grinning with: "Show Mr. Segal" — and you could have cut the irony with a blunt paper clip — "what his duties are." The girl he had addressed in such impeccable prose was carrying a tea-tray. He waited until she had put it down before he stormed into his office, chin wobbling, spluttering. "Don't take any notice, he doesn't like anybody," she giggled, as she put some sugar in the cup of tea she was holding out. "I don't take" — and my body began to shake

— “sugar,” I whimpered. She forced an unsugared cup on me. My body wouldn’t stop shaking. The cup fell from my hand and spilt tea over her dress. The porter came over. She must have called him without my noticing. I was sick over a desk. A clerk, looking for a quick promotion, ran to let Mr. Holmes know. He was told, “We can expect a lot of trouble from that Jew.” I have spent much time and energy proving the accuracy of that forecast in the last thirty-five years.

Chapter Three

LOCAL AUTHORITIES do differ. Some are large and inefficient: others are small and inefficient. Conservative-controlled ones graft big, but rarely. Labour-controlled ones graft small, but often.

Stepney Borough Council was a Labour-controlled exception to prove the rule, grafting big, grafting small, grafting often. The Jewish reformist element knew it as "Sullivan's brothers' cousins." The Irish Catholic reformist element knew it as "Solomon's brothers' cousins." Religious prejudice had led Catholic and Jew to half the truth. Messrs. Sullivan and Solomon were partners who ran Stepney as a feudal fief. Intelligent men, they employed only mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, grandfathers and grandmothers, not paraplegic, sub-sub-normal or dead. The tale that Councillor Sullivan had given his great-grandmother a job as a lavatory attendant is apocryphal, I think.

Parliament has laid down that the essential services a local authority provides shall be paid for from a Rate levied on all householders. Custom has since established that the Rate levied can also be used to pay for jaunts abroad to study local administration overseas, the breasts of strip tease dancers, and the sexual mores of the negroes beyond Calais. Councillors Sullivan and Solomon were inveterate travellers to the lands overseas at the public expense. The other councillors criticised this misuse of public funds often, but envied them always.

In 1934, when the Riga propaganda processing factory was busy producing sadistic, obscenely sexual, atrocity stories about her great northern neighbour, and the local Labour Party had come under left wing control, these two gentlemen visited the Stalinist paradise. Their report to the executive committee of the constituency Labour Party was a masterpiece of double talk that had the audience shouting for more. Among the duped and the supine was yours truly.

While in Russia, Councillors Sullivan and Solomon had learned a great deal. The managers' canteen was thrown open to all clerical staff. The manual workers were reminded that tea drinking during working hours was a privilege they had abused. Foremen were asked to report all who dallied unnecessarily over their cups, and the small number who expressed their resentment openly learned to regret their stupidity among the ranks of the unemployed.

In area and population, Stepney was among the largest of the municipal boroughs. It was also one of the poorest. One in five of its adult employable citizens was on the dole. Large numbers of shopkeepers were forced into profitable bankruptcy by the shortage of ready money. The large number of accounts that had to be written off as bad debts ran into several thousands of pounds a year. Poorer consumers were unable to defraud the local authority. They, unable to afford the deposit, from two pounds upward, had to prepay for their supply. The council rented them prepayment meters at threepence a week. These were emptied monthly by uniformed collectors, who entered the number of units used and money inserted on a Prepayment Consumer's Monthly Record of Current Consumed Account Card. All entries had to be made in the presence of the consumer, his wife, or an adult

member of the family. This was a legal obligation and a sensible one. All collectors were expected to clear a minimum of forty meters a day. Most completed this stint by 2 p.m. None had been known to report back to the office before 4 p.m., ever. After cards and money had been handed over to the senior clerk, they were locked away in a safe for safekeeping overnight.

The following morning, Mr. Holmes unlocked the safe, checked the number of cards against the total he had been given, and then passed them to his chief assistant. Mr. Holmes also removed the money from the safe as part of his duties. This he passed to an assistant one step further down in the hierarchic structure. Unless there had been a change of Government overnight he left these two gentlemen to get on with their work. They checked that the subtractions made by the collector were accurate, and that number of units shown was covered by amount of money inserted. They then passed the cards to two other clerks, less senior, who dealt with the queries raised by their two more senior brothers. The money was then taken to the bank by Mr. Holmes, flanked by two junior clerks. The cards were passed to me. I had the responsibility of seeing that they were filed away in strict reference and address order. There were twenty collectors, reading on average forty cards a day. They were always returned in a rough sort of order. This meant filing approximately 800 cards a day. I was never able to make it last longer than an hour. I also renewed all torn, dirty, greasy cards. There was enough grease on some of them to fry a plate of chips. This just meant transferring name, address and reference number to another card. I was never able to make this last longer than an hour. Afternoons I spent issuing the next day's work to the collectors. I

once made this take me all of an hour and a half. It needs a chap with a more balanced psyche than I to repeat the experience. The love for reading that is my only saving grace, I owe to the amount of time I was able to give to reading during office hours.

The members of the staff wanting to earn promotion the hard way spent their evenings at the Bricklayers' Arms, trying to get Councillors Sullivan and Solomon pickled. This shabby parody of what makes a pub lay at the corners of Osborn Street and Old Montague Street and was owned by a member of the Sullivan-Solomon clique within the local Labour Party. It charged atrociously high prices for the short-measure shorts it served. The members of the staff complained often that they were being swindled blind. They did this privately, where they could not be overheard. Religion was ever conspicuous by its absence during these evening sessions. Roman Catholics wasted pounds buying drinks for Councillor Solomon. Jews wasted pounds buying drinks for Councillor Sullivan.

The king pin of these sessions was a pimply-faced, big-nosed, pathologically mean senior clerk all called, despite his impeccable Anglican ancestry, Abey the Yiddle. He had his fellow grafters left at the starting post. He also had them paying for the drinks that he got for Councillors Sullivan and Solomon. He loaned out money at usurious rates of interest and used the interest to get the two gentlemen the drinks they craved. The man was a genius and deserves the high position within a nationalised undertaking that he holds today. Nothing was too small for his mill. He sold us buttered rolls that cost him a halfpenny to prepare at a penny each, and convinced us he was losing money to oblige his fellow workers.

The built-in urge to keep up with the Joneses one rung

above, inevitably makes the weak man weaker, the corrupt man more corrupt, and men more like men, modern version. The chaps I worked with were as useless a bunch of shits as could be found anywhere. If the big chief was watching, or it was after office hours and Councillor Sullivan or Councillor Solomon was watching, none would hesitate to help a blind lady across the street. I learned to see them as a therapy a doctor wanting his patients to die would order for all of them tending to manic depression. "I should have had that grade three. Tommy got Sullivan a double scotch last night. Dick's having trouble with his dick. Heard this one? Harvey's got the afternoon off, the grafting bastard. The new typist looks a nice piece. Leave it alone. Holmesy's got it booked. They've got a new grading scheme in the Borough Engineer's. Abey, lend us a pound till pay day. Don't call me Abey, I'm an Anglican sidesman. Dey took a piece frum der top ov der smickle, Abey. Doyle got the job. Ginsberg resigned to start a private business, dirty business. What's Doyle like One of our own. He's a bastard. Anything's better than a Jew bastard. I thought Ginsberg was all right. No bleeding Jew is all right." All taking part in these daily wastes of time were responsible citizens holding mortgages who hated only Jews, negroes, the poor and the better than themselves.

The bumpth that is so much part of local government got dealt with expeditiously enough. Charley, the thin, bald, nephritic, hen-pecked chief assistant made sure that it did. This silly little man dedicated his life to seeing that a day's work was cleared in just less than a day. It seems a rather trivial thing to dedicate one's life to, but he did it so completely he always evoked a contemptuous respect from me, despite myself. Like all

little men living unhappy lives, he sublimated his consciousness of inadequacy in the stupidest lies. To listen to him going on about his adventures was so psychopathic it was funny. His wife disliked him. His children ignored him. Mr. Holmes hated him because he was competent. Refuge in the lie was a necessity for him.

"I was in the sea for forty-eight hours. I lost my boots when the ship was torpedoed. I was so busy saving the officers I forgot where I left them. There I was in the drink, trying to keep the captain's head above water. He always depended on me a lot; I couldn't let him drown. You've never seen anything like it! The explosion had torn bodies into halves, quarters, and bits and pieces. Arms and legs were floating on top of the water." He always giggled in a rather obscene way at this point in the story. "There was a box of french letters floating by my head. I put the captain's head on it." The "it saved his life" came with an even more obscene giggle every time. "I was bleeding hungry. I gave my last sandwich to the captain. I prayed. I've always been a God-fearing man. He must have heard me calling. I remember a faraway voice soothing me. Then I stopped being afraid. I knew the Lord was going to save me. Two days later, a ship picked me up. The captain was full of gratitude to me. I wasn't even hungry when they sat me down to a meal. Steak and chips, it was. Saved by faith I was. The Lord had chosen me to be saved. The captain got me a medal. I didn't do it for that. A man's got to do his best for his fellow man and follow in the ways of the godly." This wasn't a bad personal adventure for a man who had served his time in the Royal Army Pay Corps and been stationed at Hastings for the duration of hostilities.

The congenital liar is usually also a greedy man. Charley was no exception. Each time there was a local or national election he gave himself a job as a presiding officer, fee five guineas. His salary was nearly £600 a year, at a time when a skilled worker was lucky to get £3 a week. I still preferred him to Mr. Holmes. Do your job, don't fart-arse around too obviously, save the enquiries until you learned to answer them off your own bat and you weren't bothered if you got lost for a few minutes every so often. An unsung hero in his trivial way. He drove himself to the release of death before he was fifty. We gave him a good funeral, with lashings of bouquets, bags of phoney tears, and a large number of regret telegrams from people unable to get away to the funeral. This number included three people busy trying to get Charley's job while the body was still tepid. I hope he has found someone in the Elysian fields who will listen to his epics.

I have to thank — I do at every election — the policy statements of the Conservative Party for my conversion from stupidity to Socialism. Monty the Red with the mostest of the Dialectic nearly made me pull a Macdonald several times during the four years he worked for Stepney Borough Council. I think he would have had William Wilberforce pulling the wings of flies. This prize specimen of a genus fortunately rare outside the doors of Transport House had the Communist and Labour parties running round in circles. "There's nothing in *Das Capital* that says I can't kiss Holmesy's arse, if it's in the interest of the workers." We all understood that the plural "workers" meant the singular Monty. The council who loathed his ideas promoted him frequently. No politician can afford the honesty of showing the bias he has in a one-man one-vote country. He worked among us for

a mere four years. During that time he pushed down the sale of the *Daily Worker* from one copy to no copies sold in the office daily; had Mr. Holmes granting him an accolade for arsehole crawling duties carried out beyond the potential of the other clerks; had Councillor Solomon using him as a sneak; married a wealthy Jewish woman ten years older than himself, and became a Methodist within a fortnight of the ceremony. The art of politics is knowing when to play chameleon. That knowledge came to Monty early, very early — before he learned how to walk, I think. Today he is an ardent Conservative, serving his party well as a councillor in a tory-controlled dormitory suburb.

The engineer and manager, the lynch pin of the undertaking, was a ranting, obese, drunken, efficient-at-his-job bully. He has been dead for ten years as I write this. I know of no one — and this includes his wife, children, and all the clerical and manual staff — who regrets his passing. The day before my marriage, I introduced him to my future wife. I couldn't help myself. He caught us on the stairs. Learning that one is a coward is never pleasant. He forced her to the wall. Rubbed his gross body against hers. Felt at her breasts. She fell down the stairs freeing herself. He was drunk. I went down the stairs after Olive. He stood there swaying, giggling, calling up, "Bleeding yids, always after the shiksas!" I didn't do anything. I just walked away with Olive. I haven't forgotten I wanted to kill him. I haven't forgotten I walked away with Olive. I never will, until death frees me from memory of my cowardice. He called me into his office often. As a Jew, I was just made to measure for his moronic anti-semitism. I never answered back. I said I was a coward. The Maccabees fought the Romans with

their bare hands, to die like men defending the temple of their fathers. The Jews in the Warsaw ghettos fought for fifty-seven days to let the world know that the Jew was a man who could fight. Issy Segal, the Jew whose grandmother died in Auschwitz, stood mumbling "Yes sir, no sir" as the voice of the anti-Jew droned: "Yids are bloody lucky, getting away with pushing and shoving where they're not wanted." He gave me a copy of *The Protocols of Zion*. I did not tear it up until I was safe in the lavatory. At the suggestion of a councillor I attended a school of accountancy for some years. The day I handed him the diploma that marked my successful pass, I learned "No bleeding Jew is bossing anyone while I am the engineer and manager." I never did until a year after his death.

The office was destroyed during the Blitz. The electricity undertaking was nationalized. The new set-up has seen a doubling of the staff and a trebling of salaries paid. I no longer belong to this world. The death of my wife from cancer gave me a courage I lacked in her lifetime. I became a psycho-neurotic. Courage expresses itself in strange ways. I was retired, medically unfit, with a small pension. Often as I wait for phenobarbitones to bring me relief, I see the obese body moving against Olive's. The thick, hairy hands gripping her breasts. I feel again the shame that comes with the knowing that one is a coward. I lift myself up and I call "Forgive me, forgive me!" to a body that is dead, a mind that cannot absorb what I call. I cry then, and somewhere during my tears sleep comes and I am saved, for memory to return, torment become reason for dying.

Chapter Four

THE "Ish voll nicht arbeiten fuh der lowzer. Ish harba geh arbeiten inn der bester platzer. Besser uh Curveh dan mein frow. Ein grosser tag vill Kommen fuh meir. Ish voller ulleh vizen ven der tag kommt" father eternally wailed, got on my bloody wick. Always I sought for, found, relief, forgetfulness, in the clang, clang, clang of the piston as a No. 15 bus carried me Hyde Park — West — way. I sure dug that clang, clang, clang. Only four copper coins and I had it made. Randy bints with big tits would be laying on the grass, backs arched, mouths loose, lips slack, drooling, eyes filmy. Just four copper coins and the pavement touts flogging shoddy bankrupt stock, the Tallissed Hassidim with their palais glide steps, greasy coats, long sideburns, smelly bodies and shrill "Oih Vey Iss Mear" and the Gunovim waiting to steal from the poorer than themselves, would be as dead as the lynched black boy of yesterday, as forgotten as the newspaper headline that told of the lynching.

Hyde Park, Erewhon of the nympho — old, scabby, past it, forced to buy what she had to have. Hyde Park, forum of the word that begs for the handout that means a kip, a cheese roll, a packet of fags, or a glass of beer. Hyde Park, mecca of the bent odd-man-out, driven by the moral hypocrite to the Guardsman, flogging his firm, muscular, animal, body. Hyde Park, happy hunting ground of the ponce looking for new talent to live off. Hyde Park, Isle of Cockayne of the lumpen lost, waiting for a world that will never be.

Hyde Park, parade ground of the cheap mystery, whose natural beauty came through the cheaply-scented body, rotting gums, and loose, dragging mouth. Hyde Park, the refuge that gave sanctuary to all from the harsh world without its gates. Hyde Park.

A few of the people getting off the bus grinned when Hymie shouted: "Uh piece mit a waddle maks fur a goot cuck" through the open window. The sudden collapse of their hard-worked-for English dignity was funny. I stood staring at the obese—too much Lokshen soup, chopped liver and schmaltz herring, necks creasing into fat pleats, chuckling. That all these clowns would admit to a birth certificate in the name of Cholmondley, a family tree that went straight back to Ethelred the Unready, and a total ignorance of Yiddish, I knew and didn't much like. I prefer my brother-Jews to be Jews. The gentlemanly Yiddels': "I just couldn't be anti-semitic. It's so un-English," makes the stitches of my hernia operation ache. The bus was moving away when Hymie really had them doubled up with: "Kiss uh shiksa's arse fuh mear." Watching these "some of my best friends are niggers, but they are so pushing" assimilados wasn't funny any more. I crossed the road to the Park.

I made straight for a platform on the far side of Speakers' Corner. It belonged to a saleswoman for redemption unlimited named Aggie. The old man couldn't stand the sight or sound of her. Like poles do repel. His "Der schweine mit er Got iss mina brudler iss meshigguh" was very true, very sad; because it was true and told a lot about my dad.

Aggie was an elderly, scraggy, toothless, shabbily-dressed weirdy, literally stinking, religious paranoid, who speiled the message twice daily, seven days a week. Never anything but poorly-paid, menial jobs,

years of acute loneliness, a lifetime of chronic abuse from well-wishers and employers, and the onset of menopause had inspired into religious mania. This wasn't all the poor bitch had suffered. Two years before, a drunken soldier had forced a few million spermatozoa into her womb. One of them took a fancy to the comfort and warmth of the new surroundings and began to grow. When the foetus showed that it was sprouting, she got read the Riot Act and kicked out of her room. It took a miscarriage in a public lavatory, six months on the bash, some treatment for the venereal disease picked up on the job, and the efforts of several well-meaning idiots to make her set up home in Hyde Park. During the day, she held court. At night she slept on the grass patch by the bandstand. Overfrequent, always successful, sexual demands by the other park dwellers wore her down to skin and bone. God visited her and she saw the light after a month.

There was a silver lining. Aggie was hopelessly, incurably, happily, mad. This essential for the saint added to her religious idiocies a depth and realness that alienated. "God came as I lay alone, despairing, afraid. Hallelujah, the Lord be praised ! I have come to wash all sinners in the blood of the Lamb so that they may yet be saved. In the beginning was the word, and the word was God and the word was with God, and God called unto me to become a prophet of the word and lead the Philistines to the word. Repent, sinners ! Follow in the footsteps of the Lord and I, his prophet. The day of reckoning is at hand for all who reject my call. Christ is risen !" Poverty, weakness, tribulation and menopause had led her into the dream of a supra-bodied, non-dimensional nirvana, where the lunatic walks with God.

Unemployed with the guts to demonstrate their protest were often ridden down by mounted police during the Hungry Thirties. I saw a demonstrator ridden against a wall and baton slashed when I was twelve. The expression on that copper's face is not yet forgotten. Aggie's hecklers had the same nasty half-grin. Week after week I tried to see what bitchiness in me made me plant myself among that stupid, sadistic mob of brilliantined yobbos. Having now read how the late Sacher Masoch spent his spare time, I do see. Ten minutes of "You ever had a short time with God, Aggie? St. Peter bent down and the Archangel Gabriel's wings fell off, Aggie," and my stomach became a pounding, sick-making churn. An onrush of bile to the throat was the "Harry's platform is the cure, move" red alarm. If I ignored the signs, the character in front would get a mass of undigested food over his Sunday-best pin-stripe with the wide lapels. I managed to dig a bloke in the ribs leaving. He apologised. I should have kicked him in the teeth. He might have kissed my two-piece.

Harry was a rather different misgrouping of chromosomes. He was sane — very sane. Sunday after Sunday, he held large audiences in silent thrall. This tall, pleasantly gabby, "I never wear anything from the Fifty Shilling Tailors, I get my shirts, ties, socks and underwear from the Royal Haberdasher," pasteboard Adonis, with his swarthy skin and dark curly hair, attracted the wenches as a pile of shit attracts the flies. The silly empty-heads fell over themselves to offer him fags, cups of tea, and the use of their road to the isles.

The chronic selfishness and greed of the capitalist had made Harry's Marxist apocalyptic solution for all human ills a sure-fire selling line. His overlarge weapon

had also helped. Women's professional and business groups were willing to pay high to hear him — and . . . The chairwomen of those groups must have used smoke signals. He was flooded out with invitations to do his stuff, and from them.

Some rough use of shoulders and elbows got me through the mob surrounding his platform. Harry was airing his usual appeal, to greed, hate and prejudice that is the Communist Party line. Mangy mutton was being sold as the best Filet Mignon. Stalin had. Trotsky hadn't. Bolsheviks were. Social Democrats weren't. The statements of the party are always true. Russia is menaced if we allow ourselves to get bogged down in silly debates about what is truth. The revolution will get from the workers that higher understanding that recognises bourgeois kindness, bourgeois honesty and bourgeois truth as the enemy of the revolution. This barely intelligible, semi-gibberish — Harry knew that the content of his message was improved if three big words were used in place of one small one — was very heady stuff for a youngster, this youngster, rather tired of being told he had murdered Christ, pinched jobs from Englishmen, and ravished thousands of Gentile virgins nightly. I do wish that the last had been not quite so big a lie.

Just as Harry was running into the really rousing finale for which he was famous, I felt a tap on the shoulder. A voice I couldn't quite place but was familiar, shouted "Ah haff bin kallin" into my ear. It sounded young, plaintive and appealing, Her "diss iss Annalisa" brought enlightenment. She was a fanatical young communist leaguer from Stockholm, working as an *au pair* maid while she went to school to learn English. I'd picked her up a fortnight before at a meeting and spent the night in her room. I started

shoving and elbowing my way out in answer to "Pliss followink." I kissed her and said "What luck. I've been looking for you everywhere," as we grabbed at each other.

"Ah haff bin kallink," and turned-away lips was her answer to my try for another kiss. "I'm sorry I didn't hear you," although true, got only a disbelieving sniff. This lass had a reason, a good reason, for not believing anything I said. I had solemnly promised on my scout's honour to phone and hadn't. Ten minutes after I had left her room I'd torn up the piece of paper on which I had written down the telephone number. She'd been too easy a lay. You don't phone too easy lays. You poke them and flit. There are always plenty more around.

Annalisa and I walked towards the patch of grass we both knew from past adventures in love was safe from the attention of the policeman or the pervert who gets his thrills watching. She giggled and mumbled something in Swedish as she stepped on a used condom. A bloke and his guardsman boy-friend were lovey-doveying on the patch. Annalisa did another giggle, but didn't mumble anything in Swedish. We dragged all over the park trying to find another safe spot. I got fed up with being half of a walking marathon and lifted her over the railings at the back of the big house at the Kensington Gardens end of the Serpentine and took a chance that came off. It was deserted and the grass was clean, thick and dry.

I spread out my raincoat. Annalisa crinkled her frock as she flopped out. I caught her hand as she moved to straighten the crinkles. I got on top and kissed her lightly several times. She opened her mouth. Faster, still faster, faster still. I darted my tongue in, out, in, out. The caress of her tongue was gentle, so, so, gentle.

I slipped a hand under her skirt. I caught a fingernail on the button of her cami-knicks. We both giggled. Her hair was soft, smooth, silky. Her body jerked as I stroked her. I was getting very big. The struggle to stop myself from coming too soon was making me sweat. She felt me, giggled, and put me inside. The sour, sweet, mess that was running from her made me want to vomit. A mad, uncontrollable frenzy captured my body. Faster and faster I contorted, twisted, jerked. I couldn't hold it back much longer. Now. Ah. I stayed until I became limp. The wetness of the hair was clammy on the inside of my thigh. Her mouth was loose and ugly. Saliva was dribbling down her chin. She was smiling. The disgust that began to sweep through me killed the pleasure the act had given. Annalisa, like all the other millions, must have been bloody lonely, unhappy, wanting to badly — as if I hadn't known — to push it out to a lying, couldn't care less, like yours truly. "You crummy bastard," I thought. "You've made another piece," came after. Part of me wouldn't stop wishing that I hadn't, but I knew I would again, again and again, every chance I got. Characters like me pay a big price for not having a controlled rutting season inbred.

"It was wonderful. It was wonderful." I gripped her hand tight and squeezed it hard. Annalisa knew I was putting on a bloody poor show. These cheap lays always do but they never give up trying. Going without scares the shits out of them. "Pliss telephun, pliss," made me wish my "I will this time. I will," would last. We began to walk toward the bus stop. Every time she started to say "Pliss telephun, pliss," I kissed her. Outside the Cumberland Hotel she asked me to excuse her. I bought an *Evening Standard* while she cleaned herself and put on a new face in the ladies' lavatory.

The front page said that the unemployed figure was just over two million but the government had the matter in hand. When she came back I whistled and she giggled. She'd done a nice job. I could have laid her there and then on the pavement. I suggested we had a meal before she caught her bus to Hendon. "Derr ladie vant uh shuldt kumm tzen derr ouse," she replied a little sadly. She waved as she got on the number thirteen bus. She kept on waving until it disappeared. I waved once and half waved three or four times. Going back to the park I kept mumbling "I will this time." I wasn't kidding myself, I knew I wouldn't. I didn't know the number anyway. I'd made sure I hadn't asked for it and had to explain why I needed to ask. Next day I sent a letter saying the job was taking me to John O'Groats for a few weeks. I got back a stinker. Reading it had me laughing. I wasn't aware I was crying until the tears reached my lips.

An exhibitionist has no trouble getting the public attention he craves in Hyde Park if he has a loud voice and a good repertoire of pinched witty sayings. I proved this every Sunday. I proved it again after I had walked off the dislike I had for myself, with "if it wasn't me it would be someone else," endlessly repeated this Sunday.

John was going strong when I joined in the deliberations of the Hyde Park debating society, political section. It took ten minutes to freeze John out and monopolise the discussion. From then until the coppers kicked us out I ranged over the whole arena of religion, politics, the sex act normal, the sex act abnormal, the cinema, the present state of literature and why they ought to shut up and listen. "Religion is just a bleeding wish to sit in Daddy's lap because it's dark all the time. Those bleeding softies can't write

about what matters. Up their perfumed Ivory Towers they can't." With this inspired contribution I included among the writers unable to write readable prose many of the great masters and had my stupidity applauded. "They can't help being made that way. They've got to be retreaded." I shut up the interrupter who asked, "Why must they be like you if they'd rather be like themselves?" with a smart "bents mustn't interrupt their betters." I am sorry to write he did not knock out all my teeth. "Take the film at the Regal—" John's "You take it!" got a laugh I didn't think was deserved. "It's all tits. The Russians make films. They give the tits on a cow social significance." Being such a clot then was good for me. Being such a clot now would make me a candidate for the next free bed in a nuttery.

The only homosexual I got friendly with in the park was from Kingston, Jamaica. It started with some clots calling him "a Nigger Pouf." I was hot against the colour bar at the time. It grew because he was everything I wasn't. Kind, gentle, above hate, who was, take your pick all you slimy, pious, joy hating, Gradgrinds, an obvious pansy, queer, pouf, iron hoof, browner upper, etc., etc., etc., who did naturally, joyfully, what came naturally to him to do. We lost contact during the war. The War Office couldn't, or wouldn't, confirm the story going round the park that he was dead. It's twenty-three years since we walked the Soho streets looking for an all-night cafe that did a steak. Despite the passing of those years, I still see the slow shuffling feet whipping up speed faster, faster, faster as he tap-danced to the tune he was whistling. I still remember the mellow richness of his voice as he impersonated Paul Robeson for the five-year-old daughter of his landlady. Above all I still feel, deep, deep, deep inside

the joy that knowing him, being with him, gave this non-believer in man young man.

Aggie is still belting out the old, old story. Annalisa went back to Stockholm to marry the boy down the street. She has two boys and a daughter now. I was pleased when I heard. Harry runs a thriving advertising agency and is a member of the Liberal Party. I laughed when I heard. The nut cases who made Hyde Park a forum for the free, sometimes foolish, always necessary, spoken word, are either dead, become parents with hire purchase and football pools responsibilities or have been certified insane. The sadistic, brilliantined, yobbos are still around giving people who need pity, spite, hate and envy. Creatures like these never die. They duplicate into replicas of themselves by Binary Fission.

Chapter Five

BLACK BOY was scat singing high, wild, mad. Man was he fixed good. Scabby Mac, the cafe laureate, was reciting a small effort of his own to an entranced lass which Shelley had written first. The fat Italian waitress with the blotchy skin and varicose veins was turning down a request for credit from a skinny thing with an acned skin and dark roots to her stringy, blond hair. The skinny thing came over and sat down. She looked too much like Eric's younger sister for the muck spread over the lips, cheeks and eyelids and her hard look. "I'm broke," she said. "I'd like a coffee if you got to buy." "Vat de gut nuh uh rill life gangsters molly frum Chicago, maybe." I could build myself up to a Royal Performance with dialogue that good. "I'm broke. I want a cup of coffee." She looked very young as she said this. I thought, "I bet she's prison bait." "I make you giggle. I got a better chance to make the touch." That young lady must have used Black Mask magazine to teach herself English, flashed through my mind and had me giggling. "One coffee white, Ivan," I called. For fourpence I could afford to be a good samaritan. I was grinning as I paid him. At eighteen the silliest things had me in tucks. "I'm Hannah Mathison," she said. "I'm black boys girl." "Congratulations," I replied. "I'm Issy Segal. I'm nobody's boy." The dialogue was getting real sharp. Film contract stay away from mah door. "I said I was black boys girl," she repeated. "I'm nigger bait." She pushed her hand into my mouth as she said "Want to touch." I replaced her

hand. A cup of coffee I could buy her, but getting the hurt out wanted a new world, and that I didn't have the price for. "Honey I aint no Ku Klux Klan man," I told her a little angrily. "This is the Cafe But, Soho, London, England . . . you awl state house wid de magnolia blossom is way down in Alaham." I think she wanted to cry, when she said "Mother caught me in bed with black boy. She kicked me out. I got no place to go." Only she was a tough cookie, and tough cookies don't ever. They just let it build up inside so it can curdle more hate. "What can I do ? No one's left me a hotel." I felt like giving her the boot for making me say that. "Can you use a sphaggetti and chips ?" I asked her. If I bought the bint a cheap meal I could bugger off not feeling so bloody useless. At eighteen I didn't like feeling useless. Miss Hannah Mathison was a hungry girl. She got down the sphaggetti and chips, and extra portion of chips, two buttered rolls and two gooey cakes before she said "Thank you." I could go to shool every shabbas that year. I paid the bill without adding a tip. I never tipped in the Cafe But. Ivan took half the tips customers gave the underpaid, overworked, Italian sisters who did the two o'clock to midnight shift. I used to bring them the odd second-hand frock whenever I managed to scrounge or pinch one from the stock in the kitchen. The odd cup of coffee, cake, or cheese roll slipped to me on the sly was a sufficient reward this side of heaven. I am a humble man. The time was drawing nigh. Morpheus called. I didn't fancy Miss Hannah Mathison. "Good night, see you around sometime," I said to the now smiling young lady. I was almost at the door when she called out "I'll pay you back when I get a job." It was a nice thought, but I wasn't going to allow for it in my next week's, year's income. Half way up the street I heard

her screaming Issy, Issy, he's giving me the boot. I turned back. Black boy was asking for a good swift kick in the oblates. You do not kick young ladies in the stomach on the public highway in England. In private it's another matter and if it's a poor bitch who has been pestering you for the price of a kip you get a medal. Junkies will do the stupid thing when the silly one would save them a lot of grief. The silly bastards will pay a pound for a grain of heroin to some pusher when they only have to register to get the stuff. Then bum, ponce, steal, mug for a prostitute, con, or knock a skinny little kid about for sixpence. Black boy was convinced I had given her some money and he wanted half. I tried not to hurt him. The fixed junkie can't punch his way out of a marshmallow. The sick junkie can't either. The things he threatened to do the next time we met when he scarpered would have taken a company of commandoes with perverse habits at least a fortnight. When he was round the corner I gave her five bob. She needed some all metal underwear if she played around with black boy. She followed me all the way to the bus stop, trying to kiss my hand, crying. I took her home. The Cafe But has supplied me with better tail, often.

The Cafe But was one of those eateries that cater for the youngster who has read of the Left Bank cellar dives but can't afford the money to see the real thing. It stank of the smell made by washed and unwashed bodies crammed against each other in an airless, tiny space. Ivan the terrible, the owner, overcharged atrociously for the undercooked, overcooked, over-boiled, parboiled, parodies of continental food he served, treated his customers servilely; and was loathed by the girls lack of a labour permit had driven to working for him. He insisted that their duties in-

cluded being nice to the customers with money, as he saw nice. He also expected them to share their rewards. That they went to almost any length to evade. I don't blame them. A woman is entitled to her earnings when she works that hard.

The atmosphere of the Cafe But was stinking, but friendly stinking. The furniture and fittings were the chic, modern-ugly, that makes you think of the drunken eskimo with delusions of grandeur let loose in Heal's furniture store. Then I thought it was the last word in advanced, livable with, design. I was an avid reader of the quality magazines.

The bulk of the customers came from, and were at home in, dormitory suburb bungalows. It was the screwball bearded wonders who made the Cafe But a must for the pretentious and stupid hangers-on. These non-conforming fleas in unimportant things would have driven the Gautama Buddha into misanthropism. All were not yet painting Picassos, who talk, talk talked, the paintings they would one day give to the world, or not-yet-writing writers who yak, yak, yakked, the masterpieces they would, could, write if only someone would subsidise them. As far as I could see they were all too busy conning cups of coffee to have the time to express the genius they knew lay fallow within, but they did shoot a good brand of fairy soap when conning so maybe I misjudge and they misjudged their field of artistic endeavour.

Although hard to tell, the female pseudos did differ from the male of that specie — they squatted to piss. As lost to sanity as their brothers, they saw the new world acoming in the increase in venereal disease figures and the increasingly painless nature of the cure. Debutantes and models peed tears of envy as these creatures set up new records for the number taken,

flat out, standing up, or on all-fours. A courageous publisher stuck his neck out to publish the honest, but dull, life, thoughts, and pleading of a, taking herself a little too tragically, Lesbian. The Mother Grundies and Father Grundies, as always, saw obscenity in the pure though boring, and screamed loudly enough to have it banned. As a banned book, it had to be read, and it had to be misunderstood by the Cafe But hoydens. They started fondling each other lasciviously, mechanically, before, during and after meals.

Several of the prostitutes working the Greek Street, Frith Street, Old Compton Street beat used to drop into the Cafe But to rest their tired, sweating feet. When I first found myself sharing a table with them I made my dislike obvious. I was horrified that women who made people pay for a short time were allowed into the Cafe But. As I learned that they would oblige a friend with a free ride when trade was slack, the prejudice went with the first free ride. I learned to respect these tough minded, salty, honest, but sentimental under it all, necessities of monogamous living. Funny, vulgar, never sick, humorous, they had what it takes to make the worthwhile human being in my book. Some of the mickey-taking jobs they did on their clients still make me giggle. Kraft Ebbing would have been shocked by the nature of the demands made by some of those respectably married men. There is still hope for me if I do not forget to blush whenever I remember what a twit I was when Mildred trusted me enough to say "I've got to get back on the beat. The kids want want, bleeding well want, all the time," and I came back with the Smart Alec, "pull the other one, ducky, it's got bells on." Mildred's two children were brought in by a policeman a fortnight later. The baby farmer who was caring for them didn't like the children of a

whore in the same house as her growing son when the whore was three weeks behind with her payments. I owed Mildred a favour. I knew my mother would over-ride religious prejudice for kids when there was a profit in being liberal. I suggested we try the old dutch. "Nein zey zonnen nicht goyim. Der futteh iss uh rooves zeen" had mother splitting fat globules laughing. "Drei phunt uh voch fuh der twzei" was acceptable to both. Mother was kind to children. She loved kids. But business was business.

She gave them a good home, lavished affection on them but always reminded Mildred they were paying guests. When the tale got round I became a knight in shining armour to the pros. working the Greek Street, Frith Street, Old Compton Street beat. Tarts I'd never met would stop me. "You Issy Segal?" I would say. "Yes, but I'm broke. The paters just bought himself a duchess," as a reply, always got a giggle and the offer of a free trundle. Within a month I had to beg them to be a little more miserly with their favours. I was being killed pleasantly by their generosity. I lost over a stone in weight. Not one of those girls gave me the clap. It took a session with a three-barrelled name bag to give me my one and only touch of the runs.

To convince a chump you are doing him a favour when you sell him a cup of coffee that has cost a penny to produce for fourpence is only half way to owning your own stately home. You must be able to keep him coming and bringing his friends. Ivan let us use a room at the back for debates and the occasional folk song jamboree because he realised this. Avante gardists, avante bentists, avante bull dykes, the lonely and the nut flocked in when the news got around. Ivan enjoyed being a patron of the arts. It did a lot for his ego, but more for his bank balance.

The lonely who came into the Cafe But, sat around doodling, smoking fag after fag, never answering your "anything wrong?" I just couldn't stand. I knew loneliness too well. Knew the shroud it grew over your being, the self pity it made and the wish-I-was-dead feeling it gave.

"Stop pawing the goods lady, it aint' for sale," the hate inside that coloured boy for all the landladies who had said "I don't take coloureds," the bus drivers with "no room blackie," when there was room and the overpainted bitches who had sneered "me boy friend don't like me dancing wiff a nigger," was virulent in his voice as he told the thin, nervous, middle-aged woman not to paw. The bluish veins, red fingernails and the translucence of the thin skin, of the hand gently caressing, hovering to caress again, mirrored into my mind as she understood and the hand jerkily withdrew, fell to her side. Roughly he pushed away the hand touching his shoulder, pleading please understand, as he went to a table on the far side of the room. "Please don't go. It's not like that at all, please," she kept repeating. The people at the table to which the coloured boy had gone were grinning now. It wasn't hard to guess what he had told them. The woman kept clasping, unclasping her hands, begging him to come back in the hurt look in her eyes and the taut way she held her body. The skin of her neck was drawn, ugly, cross-crossed with wrinkles, as she gulped back the tears that threatened. Everybody ignored her as she got up. She kept looking at the coloured boy, clasping, unclasping her hands, as she moved towards the door. Monty said, "We do get 'em nowadays," when she had gone. Three months later I saw a picture of her on the front page of a newspaper. She had killed herself with a kitchen knife and become news.

"Grab her Issy, she's gone bleeding bonkers." Mildred was slashing at Claude's face as she screamed "A kid, he was only a kid." I grabbed her. If she did slash that face one night Claude's pals would have pulled her into a dark alleyway, bashed her up, razor-slashed her face and stomped her. I knew those characters penchant for the razor wielded in the dark, the metal tipped shoe in the gut when you weren't looking and the knuckle-duster across the jaw as you were held tightly so you couldn't move. "You silly cow," I screamed as she struggled in my grip. "A kid, he was only a kid," she kept howling. I smacked her as she spat in my face. Monty came over. "I'll take over," he said. "You've got a game to finish." Mildred winced as he forced her to sit. "You cheap, poxy whore," Monty snarled. "Don't you want to live?" She started crying. I went back to finish my game. Claude was waiting. He was grinning as I sat down. "Mildred shouldn't be so sentimental. Whores can't afford to be," he said as he moved a pawn.

Claude was the leader of a group of petty gangsters who used the Cafe But for meals, share-outs and games of chess. He was a baby-faced, pleasant mannered, softly spoken psychopath who got pleasure pushing youngsters into becoming junkies: hence Mildred's outburst. Claude had a good mind and wrote a prose that had the aesthetes dribbling and despite this had merit. His survey of the life and sexual habits of the Hairy Ainu had been widely acclaimed by all who didn't know a Hairy Ainu from a hole in the head, and liked their smut anthropological, and well written. One expert had compared him with Malinowski. Another wrote, "Mr. Claude Smith did not waste a minute of the two years that he spent among these aboriginal people." I hadn't noticed any Hairy Ainus among the

Cafe But customers, but then I've an astigmatism and wear glasses. Monty said it was the motive he gave that had the cognoscenti dribbling as they saluted his masterpiece, "I needed money to buy a gold plated whip, old man. No gentleman enjoys a whipping with steel hafted whips."

The leader of the literary group was as queer a queer as I have ever met. Dorinda, née Charles, was a product of a well known public school who had been seduced into homosexuality by a prefect and his discovery that it was pleasurable. Psychiatrists, Charles had money, had spent a great deal of time treating him and wasted their time and his. He had laid a small armada of matlows to compensate. I don't know what the psychiatrists did. The coppers who needed a little extra money to pay off the mortgages on the palaces they bought loved him as a brother. The statement that the Chief Superintendent pleaded to be allowed to go back on the beat as a plain clothes policeman is a communist canard. Whenever one of them saw him entering a public lavatory Charles got knocked on suspicion. He was never charged. That would have killed the goose that passed over the pound notes. His eternal catting, frating and my darling man, got on my nerves sometimes. I shouldn't have been such an intolerant clot. It takes guts to be what you are when the whole world is ready to laugh and sneer at the difference they think exists between them and the poor devil they laugh and sneer at. Charles was always in that ring mincing, gesturing, irrevocably homosexual.

Charles was a pouf. He looked like a pouf. He acted like a pouf. He had the courage of his sexual proclivities. I liked him a lot. He wrote well in the brittle, catty way assumed, often wrongly I feel, to be the hall-

mark of the homosexual writer. It isn't my cup of tea but I did enjoy his short story of the black boy marching through Georgia searching for a willing white *bottom*. It had the pathos, kindly humour, fine imagery and deep feeling for the oppressed, that is so lacking in the work of so many successful writers.

Monty, straightfaced was laying it on thick. Very funny geezer Monty, if you weren't his target for tonight. Betty, as ever, got intense as she tried to understand the profundities Monty dispensed. "Betty, how can you review a film if you've seen it?" was how he began. "It doesn't make sense," he went on. I interrupted. Keeping a straight face was giving me a pain in the gut. "The Party says seeing the film inhibits the reviewer and can give him Shingles." Monty gave me a quick wink and carried on the ball. "Can't you see it's all a matter of how seeing is seen, dialectically as part of that process that is the thesis, antithesis, synthesis, of seeing seen. I am aware that the bourgeois reviewer must see the film he has been told to review first. How else can he miss the meaning that it has for the Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist, who has seen not seeing? The Party has said." I stood up rigidly to attention. Monty was talking about the Party. That unto all men who, having sought hath found within Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, that which will lead unto the promised land which is the democracy that is the proletarian dictatorship which is the freedom, that is the dictatorship shall hath given unto him the gift of non-sight so that he may lead others to follow him whereof he knoweth not the way." Betty was not hopelessly, happily, stupid. She could feel that there was something wrong. Her mind kept saying, "It doesn't sound right." When I saw her face twitch into an anger that became a shame-faced grin

I knew Monty had over-reached himself. "Monty," she said, "you're pulling my leg. Marx, Lenin and Stalin never used words like unto or hath. They couldn't, they were atheists." I sat down. I needed to convalesce after that. Monty pulled Betty to her feet and gave her a bow as he said more profoundly than I could then understand. "Eve, mother of men, I yield to thine macroscopic ignorance. Long mayest thou fulfil thine destiny and fructify." Betty giggled. She knew Monty was pulling her leg. Everybody knew he was a funny man who joked about everything. Monty died by his own hand the day after the Nazi-Communist treaty of friendship had been signed. The note he left read: "I join you Karel Capek, I too wished to sing with the angels but they made me howl with the wolves." Betty is very much alive and lives happily with her husband and their four children in a pleasant bungalow, just like the hundred bungalows on the estate, on the Epsom Road.

Like so many of the places that gave meaning to that often foolish, foolish, sometimes heroic, ever turbulent period that was the Thirties, the Cafe But is but a memory. Ivan has found other, more profitable fields for his talents. Charles like so many of the good who are sad, lonely, because they stand mincing, flaunting, defiant, refusing to be other than themselves, is dead. He died over Berlin early in 1942. Each year on the anniversary of his death I drink a noggin in the saloon bar of his favourite pub, in memory. I see Mildred often. We talk of Monty always. Twenty-four years ago I made a copy of the note he left. I have it still. I read it often.

Chapter Six

THE SYCOPHANTIC way so many barmen and waiters treat their wealthy inferiors and their rudeness towards their working class equals has, when noticed, always cut sharply, albeit temporarily, my belief in Socialism to near zero. The barman at the Chandler Arms was a bad case and would have made a Tory of Christ. His deliberate rudeness to all cloth-capped, shabbily dressed, sorry, we've got to make our half pints of mild last, mate, merited, but never got, a kick up the arse. The mater should have taught him that Yossil O'Malley and Baron Rothschild K. Raleigh have the same fundamentals and lineaments no matter who their tailor and then choked him to death.

Whoever gave women their ovulatory cycle should have been boiled to death in radio-active oil. God, nature, designed by accident, accident by design, didn't have the right to make Helen, on my nineteenth birthday, incommodious. I had spent time, money, nervous energy, and pretended to like her, to get her "all right on your birthday," then, wham, nature disposed and admission into the holy of holies was out. Scientists must give some thought to this anomaly of biologic function. It should not be beyond their genius to invent a tablet that painlessly stems the flow at crucial times. They have given us H bombs, drugs that destroy personality, a longer lease of useless life, more efficient forms of chemical and bacterial warfare, without losing any sleep.

There was a little more to my malaise than anger at

the rudeness of a barman and the natural disappointment that had left me feeling low, sore and hard done by. I do not like public houses at any time. To stand at a bar drinking quantities of slightly alcoholized, coloured water amid a mob of hearties yak, yak, yakking, of this or that in a brewers' version of an inn of yore makes me slightly sick, always. That this statement libels the dedicated advertising copy writing hacks who will be pleased to keep selling the pub for just as long as the brewers are wealthy, troubles me, but not unduly. They would trouble me more if they weren't such tough, gin-soaked, hucksters working out in private cynicism their contempt for themselves.

I got off at the Tottenham Court Road Station and went to the Chandler Arms, the headquarters of the so, so carefully, carelessly dressed, Byronic, longhairs of the Left. I liked the beautifully articulated Marxist sounds they abused their vocal cords to make. I liked the feeling of belonging to the club that talks of the better things than being in their company gave. I liked their seeming tolerance, seeming radicalism and seeming wish to be friendly with this Jew boy, very much. I liked almost everything about them until I got to know them. I ceased going to the Chandler Arms then.

This explains why I used the Chandler Arms. It does not explain why they chose to do so. That would, I think, demand a psychiatrist who has had some training in anthroplogy. Memory, my diary for that period, much deep thought, fails to provide any clues toward a solution of this mystery. The fittings in both bars were modern and if anything uglier than those of other pubs. Aseptic was the only name an honest man could give to the atmosphere. The beer sold was the same chemically adulterated gnats' piss one gets in all pubs and seemed to taste that little bit worse.

Only the Scotch, Gin, Rum, drinker got served quickly, without screaming "I've been waiting ten minutes." Yet it was full at week-days and packed to suffocation point at week-ends. On second thoughts it would be unfair to expect a psychiatrist with anthropological training to provide an answer.

Monty had suggested I use the Chandler Arms. "The biggest bunch of no nothings outside the Royal Enclosure at Ascot. You'll feel at home immediately," won me for the idea. I began by using the public bar. The beer there was a penny a pint cheaper. A fortnight of "You want seventeen, and then double-seven; I fancy the Spurs on Saturday; Frank and his old woman had a dust up on Thursday, beaten by a short 'ead, 'e was" and not even the penny extra on the pint could keep me out of the saloon bar. Here, among the junior B.B.C. willowys, the writers for the magazine auntie put up the money for, and the chappies who went to the Soviet Embassy receptions, I became as a new man. Listening to the witty profundities that dribbled so effortlessly from their lips gave point and meaning to existence. "How does one make the grade as a human being? By not troubling to get born." "He writes always for an age. The age being five to ten." I really must have been uniquely stupid at 19.

Mac was the clear proof that man has earned, several times over, the right to live in an overheated, radioactive, shark-infested pond, and won't change, ever. This male prostitute with the personable body, the soft black hair that you just love to run your hand through, the fine, thin, musician's hands, the open, attractive face, the clear blue eyes that looked straight into yours when he lied, and the beautiful speaking voice, had us running round in circles to buy him drinks, fags, and the right to join his clique. He wrote

well, in a style that culture periphery asses called as good as Henry Miller's. This was not his only talent. He made the rough trade selling himself to elderly, wealthy obscenities of both sexes. Mac was a nihilist, a social, forever quoting from the works of Genet, passages that Genet had never written. Genet has at least a kinship with the thief, the ponce and the prostitute, and declares it openly in fine prose. Mac was an obscene snob who would kick an unemployed man up the arse as soon as look at him; sooner if there was no one around to kick him back and the unemployed man was too weak to resist. Within his lights Mac was the least demanding man I have known. The occasional meal in the very best of restaurants, the occasional week-end at a stately home, the occasional feel of an aristocratic prick, the occasional duchess dropping her nicks, and he was content. Everybody in the saloon bar, including this Issy, loathed him. Everybody in the saloon bar treated him as a close, well-loved friend, and that includes this Issy, too.

"I bet she's twenty years older than me. I like the tiny little shrimp. I like the way she piles her hair up on top. Mac says she hates Jews. Won't talk to us. Won't take a drink from us. I'll show the cow. I like her though. I like the quiet way she sits at the bar. Makes her look real compared to these," and in my mind I took in the saloon bar crew. "Shame she's an anti-semite. I would have liked to be friends. I can use a friend. These shits," and again I swept my eye round the crew in the saloon bar. "Worse she can do is say 'Bugger off, Jew Boy.' I've had it before, so what." I thought all this while I stood at the bar wondering whether to speak to a middle-aged woman who came in nightly to have a quiet drink and never spoke to any of us. She had intrigued me for a long time. I had

wanted to speak to her for a long time. I wanted to sleep with her, but not very much. I got off the bar stool. "Hell," I thought, "I'll show the anti-semitic cow."

"You're a fool," Monty said. "You know Mac."

She looked surprised when I said: "I'd like to buy you a drink." They left her alone in that bar.

"No, thank you," she said.

"I'm a Jew. I hear you don't like Jews."

"I reserve the privilege to dislike some Jews," she replied. "If that makes me an anti-semitic, I'm sorry."

"It's people like you that stand in the street laughing, watching old men scrubbing in the gutter, getting kicked by brown-shirted bastards."

"Not all the people in Dachau and Oranienburg are Jews."

"Uh humanitarian anti semit. Goot fuh der Yiddeh, Nicht fuh de Goy."

"It is good to speak in Yiddish when one is unhappy, yes?" she said.

"My grandmother cried for pity in Yiddish when they came. They laughed."

"Many Nazis speak Yiddish well."

"When they do it to us over here, you can translate the screams."

"I don't think they will ask that of me."

"It is not right for the ladylike anti-semite who does not like Jews to suffer in Dachau and Oranienburg." The quietness of the woman was infuriating. Nothing I had said shattered that calm of hers, nothing. I hated her.

"Sit down, please." She patted at the bar stool. "Here, please."

"I wouldn't sit next to you if they paid me."

"I'm not an anti-semite. I'm not a whore. Bad

things have been done to me, but I am not a whore." The anti-semitic whore. Who did she think she was talking to ? Who was she trying to convince ? I knew what she was. Mac had told me how she had laughed at the pictures of the Jews being led through Berlin streets.

"Why don't you want us to live ?" I shook her. "Why ?" I pushed her. She fell off the stool. I spat at her. She wiped away the spittle.

"You are a fool." The tone was quiet and dead. The woman was mad. I had spat at her.

"No anti-semite tells me what I am."

"Please sit down." She was standing by the stool, wiping her cheek with her handkerchief.

"When will you tell me some of your friends are Jews ? When ?" I sneered.

"My husband was."

"Your husband was what ?" Oh God. No, not this, please not this, I thought.

"My husband was a Jew. He died in Dachau."

"Please, please, I didn't know, I didn't know." The bastard. The dirty, rotten, crummy bastard. "Mac said you laughed when he showed you the picture of the old Jew scrubbing the pavement. He said you laughed. Please, I didn't know. I believed him, please."

She put an arm round my shoulder. God ! she was forgiving me. I started to cry. "It wasn't me. I believed him. Please."

"This I understand. It is all the people who is tortured. It is bad to feel very much but to do nothing, because is nothing to do. That is hurting very much, very much." She squeezed my shoulder. "Is important you hurt back, otherwise you go mad. I know is so. Belief me, I know is so."

"You're not English. There's something German in the way you use words." Funny how I noticed when it was too late, very funny. I was laughing when they shot Hitler. Now I wanted to cry.

"I is Garman. My name is Tina Blucher."

"You're who?" I choked with surprise, and an overwhelming shame.

"I is Mrs. Tina Blucher."

"Heinz Blucher's wife?" God, no, I prayed. I was going to kill Mac. She was Tina Blucher, Heinz Blucher's wife. God, I must have been mad to believe him. I must have been mad. Heinz Blucher's wife! Please, God, no! His screams as I tightened my hands round his throat would atone my shame. God! She was Heinz Blucher's wife. God! No! Please not.

"I is the wife of Heinz Blucher who is dead."

"It was your husband who was in the camp with Ossietsky." I wasn't asking a question. I knew.

"My husband died with him in Dachau."

"It won't help. Whatever I say. It won't help."

"My husband wass a Jew. His name wass Heinz Blucher."

"He was a fine man." I broke into German. I wanted to reach to her. Let her feel the shame. "Ich kannen garnicht sagen. Garnicht. Besser ich zol zein todt mit am und Ossietsky. Besser ich zol zein todt."

"Satzen zee." God! She was smiling. She must be mad.

"Better I speak English. I must learn."

"I will teach you. Forgive me. Please! I did not know."

"Now I should like, please, the drink you say."

"I'm not fit to drink with Tina Blucher, the wife of Heinz Blucher. I'm not fit." Her husband, the man who had been tortured and refused to break and

betray. Tina Blucher, who had hidden children in her home. God ! Punish me. Punish me. God ! Punish me and I'll believe in you always. Punish me ! I was not fit.

"Is nothing to forgif. You hate very much because is murder in Garmany and world does nothing. I understand. Hate make hate this world, this people."

"I'll be back in a minute. There is something I must do. It is important. I owe it to your husband. I owe it to him very much."

She put out a hand to restrain me as I moved away. I brushed it aside, very gently. "Please don't stop me. Please. I must. Please don't stop me. Please."

"Sometimes is necessary to do, but always is bad," she said, and withdrew her restraining hand.

The crowd round Mac was laughing as I pushed my way through. It must have been a very funny joke, about Tina Blucher and I, he had made. Monty grabbed at my arm. I pushed him away violently.

"She wasn't an anti-semite. She didn't laugh at the picture of the Jews you never showed her. Her husband died in Dachau. He was the Heinz Blucher who died with Ossietsky. You know, the Ossietsky who got a Nobel prize," I said as I punched him in the face. "I'm going to spoil that nice face of yours, Mac. Spoil it very bad," I said as I kept punching him in the face. Blood from his nose fell onto my hand. I looked at the bright redness smearing the white of my hand. "She wasn't an anti-semite, Mac," I said as I kicked him in the groin. He began to scream. I thought I would kick him to death. Sometimes you forget to be afraid of your fear of what they will do to you after. None of his friends made any attempt to interfere. Even the dirtiest piece of dirt has a breaking point for taking evil. The barman and Monty grabbed me. The

barman's hands, round my neck, squeezed tightly as I struggled and kicked at him. I struggled all the way to the door. I wanted to kill the bastard. They were stopping me.

When Tina came out I was being sick in the gutter I had been pushed into by the barman. Monty had wanted to stay with me, but I wouldn't let him. She took me home with her. She cried a great deal during the night. She called me Heinz as her body threshed under mine. "Heinz leiber iss Goot," she screamed as her body jerked in orgasm . . . went still.

I left while she still slept. My body had been the vessel that brought relief — no more. Heinz Leiber it was she had been with when the body jerked in orgasm . . . went still. With me gone, the memory would last longer.

Life must have been insupportable the day she called at my home. I had warned her that my mother was a bitch to the women who called. Mother was a goot Yiddisher Mumma who was doing her best for her children in the good marriage arranged by a marriage broker for a fec. Tina's "Issy is in, please?" gave mother the chance to strike a blow for tradition, greed and good business. "Vuss duss der old whore vant mit mein zon?" she asked Tina. A month later, when I told her that Tina had been found dead in her room the day before, she was, of course, rather upset by the news. It was the only time I struck her hoping to break her jaw. When Monty told Mac Tina Blucher was dead he asked who she was and should he know her. We had to wait two days to get him alone. We got a great deal of pleasure from his screams.

"Of course he doesn't lay 'em. He hasn't the necessary to do the job. He cases debutantes because he's got an arse fetish," Monty said, grinning, as he

took me over to introduce Levantine Joe. This passé Gentleman Johnny was wearing the camel hair coat Monty swore he wore in his bath, and the phallic-shaped cigarette holder the Duke of somewhere or other had given him jutted out from the thick-lipped, greasy mouth, as always. Monty had posted me on protocol. "Don't kick him up the arse and maim his centre of industry, whatever you do." I obeyed the protocol as given and never did. I was often tempted, but something always stopped me, probably my support for the aims of the R.S.P.C.A.

Levantine Joe always arrived at the Chandler Arms on the dot of eight o'clock, rain, hail or snow. Then with the "Hello, my dears" over and the arses vetted, he would take his pew by the fire. Then would come the shufti around, the nod to the chosen one, the rush of the one to the bar. A man of integrity, our Levantine Joe. He never conned a beer, because he never drank beer. Monty's: "Schmaltz Herring have a half of bitter on yourself just for once, please, and give us a miracle," got a sniff that a duchess goosed by a butler with unmanicured fingernails couldn't have beaten.

The genuinely witty, technically proficient, classic mandarin he wrote was deservedly popular with the better classes, and some clots among the lower orders. A silly critic who called him a "Firbank without Cochones" began a literary controversy that, rather pointlessly, I thought, used a great deal of paper and printers' ink. No one has ever said Firbank had Cochones, not even Firbank. Levantine Joe may have been an ungenerous, snobbish, self-loving, posturing prick, but, as a writer, there was more to him than the dandruff on his coat collar. Lacking the jealous nature

that makes the good literary critic, I always forgave him all his faults except breathing.

I saw her standing at the far side of the bar. She drank the way a punchie stumblebum fights—compulsively, without joy. She never missed a night in the saloon bar. Watching her getting tanked up, soberly, sadly, without laughter, intrigued. I got obsessed with the urge to shag the creature into expressing emotion.

I knocked the glass over deliberately. Every other way of making the pick-up had failed. She didn't get angry. She didn't get anything that showed. She hadn't got anything that meant anything emotionally for a long time, the poor bitch.

"People have been hung for less than that," she said, wiping her sleeve.

"I know, but not by you."

"You think I'm easy because I'm a drunk. I can tell."

I was smiling as I remembered where I'd read it as I said: "They always are when they are."

"That's very clever. I like people who can say clever things."

"I want to sleep with you. I wouldn't like you if you were Rabelais's sister," I thought. "I'm not really clever, I read it in Hemingway," I said.

"You want to sleep with me. I do it very well when I'm drunk. I never cry when they hurt me."

"I owe for the one I spilled," I said as I ordered another for her. The barman gave her a double. I didn't argue and paid. He probably liked her, and I knew he didn't like me.

"You bought me a double. I like you," she said as she sipped her drink.

"The barman gave you a double. He doesn't like me." I thought "Good for you, mister barman, you

put one over," as I made myself more comfortable on the bar stool.

"I can pay you back," she said, fumbling with her bag.

"I'm a Jew," I told her. "I always do the generous thing, because everybody expects me to do the mean one. It's one of the worst things about being a Jew. You can't be mean, because they expect you to be mean."

"I was married to a Jew. He also said clever things. He hurt me. Look." She showed me the scar of a burn on her arm. I touched it gently. I'd like to think it wasn't the mistrust it was.

"That must have been a bad burn."

"He did it with a lighted cigar. I must have a graft some time. The doctor says I should. I don't know. I don't like hospitals."

"I should, if he says so. It's his job to know, after all," I told her, wondering what the hell I'd got into. The woman was mad.

"You won't burn me if I let you sleep with me, will you?"

"I haven't burned anybody since I read Krishna-murti."

"You must read a lot."

"I've got lots of time left from the time I spend not burning people."

"I've often thought of killing myself."

"I have too," I said, "but something always stops me."

"I knew a girl who killed herself. She was a German. I liked her. She was a Jewess, but she never burned me."

"I think I know who you mean. My mother helped her to make up her mind to die."

"Her name was Tina Blucher. I met her here."

"I knew her, too. I liked her."

"Why did he burn me?"

"Someone hurt him a long time ago. He forgot everybody hurts everybody, and it made him angry."

"I don't hurt everybody. I sleep with them and they hurt me, but I don't cry. I never cry."

"I won't hurt you," I said. "I don't know how. The books I read don't tell me."

"You will. You'll burn me. My husband burned me. He was a Jew."

"I don't smoke cigars. I can't burn you. There's a protocol about burning people. No Jew who doesn't smoke cigars is allowed to burn anyone. They excommunicate him if he does."

"You're very clever, and I don't understand you, but please don't burn me. Please."

"Have another drink." I called for a double this time. The barman grinned.

"I like you. You buy me drinks. I don't think you'll burn me."

"I told you I'm not allowed to burn people." I was getting tired of her. The mad frighten me when they're not joyously mad.

"Can I come home with you? I won't cry if you hurt me. I never cry."

"My mother hasn't read Krishnamurti. She doesn't like me to bring a woman home unless she's Jewish and she knows the family."

"You can come home with me. I have a room. It's a nice room."

"I'll get you a bottle of whisky at the shop down the road. I think I'd like you to have a bottle of whisky because a Jew burned you."

"I'd like to go with you," she said grabbing my

arm. "You're going to buy me a bottle of whisky. I like people who buy things for me."

I was going to sleep with her. I was a Jew who didn't burn people. She liked me. I said clever things she didn't understand and bought her drinks. I could be proud — justly.

In the cab, I told the taxi driver: "We make the wrong people pay." He thought I was mad. I could see that from the way he looked at me when I said this.

It was a pleasant room. I liked the Degas prints on the wall. I undressed her. The weals across her back had almost healed. I didn't sleep with her that night. I tried very hard, but my body wouldn't play. Sometimes a body has more conscience than a mind and refuses to play the game, and you can't get stiff, and you're glad with part of you.

I left home to live with her. I lived with her for three months. She was pitifully mad, and I grew to hate her. We got drunk in the saloon bar of the Chandler Arms often. I was always able to sleep with her on those nights after. I made her go to a doctor, who said she needed psychiatric treatment. She had to wait a little while before there was room for her in Claybury Mental Hospital. I visited her once a week for a month, and then I got tired of having to change from the train to a No. 10 bus at South Woodford station, and stopped going. I didn't answer her letters, so she stopped writing. I 'phoned Claybury one day, and they told me she had been transferred to the main building and certified. I didn't phone again. She had made me feel pity, and I hated her for that; and you cannot 'phone to enquire how the people you hate are keeping. It makes you hate them all the more when you hear they are doing badly.

The "I must go to the Chandler Arms" vogue among the genteel Left died when war was declared in September, The Lemmings — myself among them — flocked into the Armed Services to defend the drab grey against the attack of the wholly black. It had been good going to the saloon bar in the evening, meeting people who accepted Jew Boys because Marx, Engels, Lenin, said "accept and make the revolution." Today, I hang on tightly to the memory of those days with the tenacity of dried excrement clinging to a child's nappy. The memories of one's youth recalled in middle age excuse the actions of one's middle age and justify not reaching old age, I pray.

Chapter Seven

I NEVER FAILED to recognise the signs. The angry-looking woman with the prim, bloodless face and the fidgeting body and hands was interested. The pendulous breast that had grazed the back of my hand, returning to touch fleetingly, softly, as she bent forward to douse a barely-smoked cigarette, and the half-ashamed, half-amused nervous twitch that had flashed, disappeared, as she apologised, telegraphed this. She had been warmed. I had felt this surely, as my eyes feasted hungrily as the breasts rose and fell. The body moved jerkily; the hands, clenched, unclenched, were never still. The legs crossed and uncrossed. The breath came and went in bronchitic gasps. The eyes had softened, called, as my hands had pleaded "please, let me . . . please," to touch, caress, squeeze savagely, make her whimper "Now, please . . . now." At 19, I never failed to believe this was what I was seeing when, always then, there was need for the mirage that is made by, exaggerated by, the urgency of my youthful urge. Sometimes if the woman was sexually hungry, tormented by this sexual hunger, and hated herself for being so, the mirage became reality and the two bodies sought, found, in orgasm relief. But often, too often for this man when young, the fear made by the urge for security, the urge to belong, be accepted, the psychosis to own many possessions, atrophied sometimes, made perverse always, this natural desire. Then the primeval, natural desire to feel the ambition, fire, virility of the youth

explode within, sought surcease in the prosaic, marital coupling of bodies and the clumsy fondling of hairy, sweating, over-familiar hands.

"Bet she's shackled up lots of times," I thought. "She looks easy."

"I could call one of the stewards over," she said.

"You could. Magistrates do always take the woman's word."

"I'm not old enough to be that easy."

The voice was amused. The eyes were dancing, mocking. She wouldn't. "The gentleman always gives the lady the benefit of her actions," I said. I had read this somewhere. It was one of those silly things writers give their public to raise a cheap giggle. I often used it at these times.

"You don't meet that kind of gentleman outside the pages of a fairy tale."

How many had there been? Ten, twenty, thirty, a hundred, more, pick ups to make the eyes go sombre, sad, so quickly, I wondered.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I thought — I don't know what I thought. Yes I do. I wanted to make you giggle."

"It's not a bad line when you can't think of a better."

"I can't stand the speaker. I don't believe he's sincere."

I saw my chance going up in the air. I needed to change the subject quickly. She had smoked too many cigarettes, twitched her body and hands too often, crossed and uncrossed her legs too frequently, to be one of the worshippers. This should do the trick, I thought.

"A man who can lie to me in bed is always sincere on a public platform." It was said without sadness by a woman amused by the many times, in the many strange beds, with the many men, beyond sadness.

What lies had he told ? What lies would I tell after, sated, wanting to sleep, I wondered. "Would you like me hung, drawn or quartered ?" I had just read *Fiesta*. Making Lady Bretts one met at Communist Party meetings was easy now.

"Bastinadoed and caponed would be better."

"Surely not caponed," I said giggling. "You get so fat."

"You can't be Jake otherwise."

I began to like her. I do not usually like the middle-aged women I pick up. Liking them can spoil things. You find you can't, and they laugh at you. No man likes being laughed at when he fails to satisfy at any time. It is worse when you are nineteen, and know that failure in bed is a crime.

"I have read *Fiesta* and some of his short stories," I said. "But I don't see the point."

"There wasn't any," she said, giggling. "I just wondered what you'd be like as a Jake, that's all."

"Very unhappy," I told her very sincerely, and in this I was sincere.

"I don't believe in his people. I don't believe in the way they are with themselves," she said.

"I like them. I like the way they say things flippantly, with lots of meaning behind the flippancy."

"Young men who read Hemingway always see what isn't there."

"I want to be his kind of person. Having things happening all the time, important things. Living."

"Robert Cohn was middleweight champion of Princeton."

"I've never been a middleweight champion of anywhere," I said. "The rest is true."

"It wasn't hard to guess."

"Do you want us dead ? Are we too pushing ? Too

something you can't stand?" I said angrily. Not another, I thought, not another of those.

"Sensitive young Jews shouldn't pick up strange women."

"I shouldn't. I know it's not done, but I do. It's being circumcised that's responsible." Give us another week and we'd be discussing tribal customs! I'd had it this time. Might as well play it for laughs.

"They should make it compulsory. That would make it easier for both sides."

"I'll let the Chief Rabbi know," I told her giggling. "He's bound to be interested in changing the shape of the Gentile beast." I wanted a session in bed. I was getting a discussion on the penis propiece with, without. "Mumma, where were you?"

"It is a clean thing to have done."

"I know," I said. "All the best males are doing it to show Hitler how they feel about the Jews. The women show their sympathy in another way. It's painful having it done when you're a woman. I read a book about it once."

"Get very many with that plea for sympathy?"

"A few here and there. The competition is so keen in this field. There's all those Negroes, Armenians, Maltese, Cypriots, and Chinese in the race. Makes it tough to get a high batting average. Mumma, where were you?"

"The Scandinavians prefer negroes, I hear."

"So do German, English, French, Peruvians and American girls."

"There is still the Eskimo girl."

"It takes too long to undress them. You can freeze to death."

"Their Igloos are very warm."

"I'm nineteen years old. I'm Jewish. Remember you guessed? You spoke to me. Remember? I can go."

"Don't you want to sleep with me any more?"

"Not very much."

"Does circumcision affect the sense of humour?"

"I wanted to talk to you, not seduce you." I said this knowing I was being a bloody liar, hoping she wouldn't.

"I seem to have shocked you into lying, obviously."

Whatever I said wouldn't matter if the itch inside her was as great as I thought. I had been a fool to lie. She would have called a steward over ages ago if she didn't want to.

"I'm sorry I lied," I said. "I spoke to you because I wanted to sleep with you. Satisfied now?"

"That's better," she said. "Always tell the truth when you think it will make things easier."

"You've asked for it," I thought. "You're going to get it."

"I still think the bloke spouting is a bloody liar." He was someone she knew well, that was obvious if he'd shagged her more than once. From the way she spoke it looked as if the sessions had been many and varied. "See how you like it," I thought. "Let's hear you squeal."

"He is sometimes," she said sadly. "I wish he wouldn't be."

"I was at a party with him once. He was as drunk as a coot. I think he told the truth that time."

"What did he say that makes you so sure?" she asked, giggling.

"Only that the dopes who believed him wanted their heads examined."

"They do." The woman was a bloody yo-yo. Her voice showed no feeling yet I was sure she felt deeply

for and pitied the dopes who went for the line the speaker peddled.

"I hate the Party hacks who sell you out. He's one of them." I wanted to hurt. The bitch had played with me. Let her giggle her way out of that one. Nineteen is a good age to be an insensitive clot.

"You're a very unpleasant young man." In this I could tell she was being sincere. I was an also ran from then on.

"Knowing that worries me sometimes." At nineteen I was a silly swine. "My friends say the years have not improved me. I am inclined to agree with them in this, and this only."

"Jake wouldn't have made that remark." The bitch was laughing. I'd show her.

"He didn't have any balls. He couldn't help being a gentleman." She didn't stop laughing. She was nuts. To hell with her. "Those bastards would kiss the boot that kicked them if it had 'Made in Moscow' tips on the toe."

"It's so easy to see it now." Now she was sad again. Bigger her, I wasn't getting paid to take it all so easy.

"Goodbye. See you around." I got up as I said this.

She put a hand on my arm. "Please sit down," she said. "You won't ever know if I would if you leave."

I stared at her. This was a prize piece. Maybe she would. She was nutty enough. "All right, I'm a glutton for punishment" I said, as I sat down.

"Why did you speak to me?" This now. She was meshiggah.

"I've been watching you trying to make up my mind. You kept twitching your body, crossing and uncrossing your legs, lighting fags and throwing them away half smoked, biting your lip. Look," I said, and

brushed my hand across her lip and showed her the blood on my fingertip.

"You should write a book. The young man who picks up middle aged women should write a book. He has the poor novelist's eye for the banal and irrelevant. She took my hand. It felt clammy. "I have written many books" she said, squeezing my hand.

I knew who she was now. I wanted to sleep with her very much. I had wanted to before, a little. In that I hadn't lied. But not as I did now. Not with the feeling I did now. She was the one who had taught me, shown me how, to stand upright and scorn the stones the Yobbos threw. It had been in the Reading Room of Whitechapel Library that my father had handed me a book. "Duss iss Gutteh schriben," he had said. I had loved her from the day I read that book. The negro who had died savaged had made me want to scream "bastards, bastards, you do it to me too." "It was good writing, vater sehr goot," in Yiddish also, I think. "I had slept with her often since then. Felt her body beneath mine, calling, arching, absorbing, giving a little of the mountain of good she had to give. "I love you," I said. "I've loved you since I was fifteen."

"You don't have to lie," she said sadly, "you will until you get tired of sleeping with a middle aged woman."

"I love you," I said, "I want to sleep with you for always."

"You're not the first young man who has said this," she told me sadly.

"I know only of me. I know I love you. I do not know the other young men," I said, wondering how many there had been.

"Fitzgerald was a good writer who was bad for the young who read him."

"I love you," I said, "I have not read Fitzgerald."

"The world is wonderfully made and gay and the young men sleep with middle aged women for always because the world is wonderfully mad and gay."

"The Jew does not believe that the world is wonderfully mad and gay. He knows it is neither of these things. The Ghetto teaches that early." I reached for her hand and kissed each knuckle gently. "I love you. Please believe that, please."

"I won't remind you when the old body sickens," she said sadly.

"You'll let me make love to you, but you'll never feel what's inside the young man loving you. You won't do that until you believe me."

"I'm tired of the young men who sleep with me and say they love me until they have slept with me."

"I love you. You wrote very beautifully of the negro who died in the swamps of Louisiana. I've loved you since I read that."

"I write beautifully and I say nothing," she said sadly. "I have not said anything for a long time. I cannot now. It is gone with the young men who have loved me and lied."

"Write about the Jew boy who was rude and made you angry. There's a story there. There's a story in his fears, hates and groping to understand." I wished to comfort her knowing I loved her while ashamed to introduce her to my friends as my loved one. There was a story in the fears, hates, and groping to understand. If she would not write that story, one day the Jew himself would. That I knew.

"The hates, fears, angers, gropings of the Young Jew. Young everywhere need the word that had mean-

ing. I can only write beautifully and say nothing." She ran her fingers along my cheek. She was smiling. I was glad. "It has taken many years to write beautifully and say nothing, many years." She was still smiling as she retraced the passage her fingers had taken across my cheek. "You could not do that, young man who loves me because he read the story of a negro who died. You lack the talent to write beautifully and say nothing." She was still smiling when her body shook and I knew she was near to tears. She forced my head round. She ran her hands along her body with a lechery that was sad. She pulled me toward her. Forcing me to see, as the hands ran down the scrawniness of the middle aged body. "You will spit at this ugly, old, unable any longer to satisfy, woman who writes beautifully and says nothing." I released myself gently. I kissed the knuckles of her hand tenderly, whispering "I love you," as I kissed each knuckle. "How soon will it be before you ask me to sleep with your friends, a day, a week?"

"A light year," I said. I wished to make her laugh and see that I loved her, and could not.

"Will you stay until I have written the novel of the young Jew who slept with the middle-aged woman because he read a story she had written?"

She should have used phenobarbitone, they are quick and cheap. This way she wouldn't live, wouldn't die, for a long time. "The time must be today. Today is the time of the novel. The negroes who die, the Jews who are tortured, the middle-aged women who write beautifully and say nothing, the young men who wish to sleep with the middle-aged women, will give to the novel the beauty of fantasy." She pulled at my sleeve. "Kiss me," she said. "Kiss me so that I will know, kiss me." I bent over and kissed her on the cheek. She

forced my face round and kissed me on the lips. She began to cry. I put my arm round her as I soothed her, kissing gently, so gently, each line of her face. "Please don't leave me," she begged, "please."

I withdrew my arm gently. I knew I was ashamed. "You frighten with your unhappiness. I'm afraid I'll hurt you not knowing. I don't want to hurt you. I love you."

She put a hand to my lips to silence me. "I must remember to make the villain tell the truth while drunk at a party."

"Yes, you must," I said happily, seeing her smile.

"One day you will write a book," she said, "that will tell harshly, angrily, in rough words breathing truth, the story of the middle-aged woman he met at a Communist Party meeting."

"One day I will write that book. It will say harshly, angrily, the things I wish to say about myself, the world I have known; people, those who betray, those who are betrayed; what I have learned dodging the stones they threw. This I promise."

"I am nineteen and I wish to sleep with all the men in the world," she said giggling as she put her hand in mine. "I love you. I love the warmth of your loins pressing upon mine." She ran her hand along my coat lapel slowly. "Our bodies will know each other, seeking, finding, sustenance." Her hand grew heavy on my shoulder. "Please, you will not steal, promise?"

"Stop being a fool. I love you. I do not wish to steal from you. I have never stolen." I felt a great pity for her. God alone knew how often people had slept with her, then robbed her. I would not. This I knew surely.

"It was in a Parisian café that I met him," she said sadly, remembering. "He loved to fondle my breasts

while we walked by the banks of the Seine. One can in Paris," she said, noticing my expression of surprise.

"I would like to do that," I said.

"That was what he said, too, before he robbed me," she said. "My body was old. It had sickened him. He had suffered and wished to be paid for his suffering, and was ashamed to ask."

"I do not have to steal from you. What I wish from you you will give freely, wishing to."

"You are nineteen, and tomorrow you may be sickened by the night with the middle-aged woman. The ugly body of the middle-aged woman you have known will disgust after, being seen."

"You've missed out the bit that says the middle-aged woman who writes beautifully, saying nothing. Don't miss that bit," I said, caressing her cheek." Get it all out of your system now. Tomorrow will start a new life for us both. There must be no memories of being robbed, men who lie, the world outside."

Her laugh was the laughter of a child — clear, unaware that man robbed man, man killed man, man betrayed man. "We will walk along the banks of the Seine. You will fondle my breasts. Our bodies will know each other. You will love me kindly, tenderly. The daylight will come with the morning. Then . . ."

I pulled her to her feet. "Then is for ever. I love you." I pulled her tightly in to my chest. The talk was over. I knew I loved her. I did not know the others. I would not rob her. It was enough. I half carried, half led her toward the entrance. Some people shushed us. I waved to them. She was grinning as we went through the door.

I slept with her many times. I fondled her breasts walking beside the Seine. I did not rob her, as she

had been robbed by the young man she had met in the café. I am an honest man. I do not steal money, jewellery, possessions, unimportant things.

Chapter Eight

“Once I built a railroad,
Made it run.
Made it race against time.
Once I built a railroad,
Now it's done.

Buddy can you spare a dime ? ” I sang. Forsooth, I was in good voice this night. Caruso should have such range. He'd be playing the London Palladium.

“Well, Prokofiev, what's the verdict ? ” I asked Johnny.

“You can't sing.”

“So I can't sing. Sue me.”

“The song's sloppy.”

“Anudder erudit musicologist we got.”

“Bad language won't get you anywhere with me, my man.”

“All right, I can't sing goot. The song is sloppy. I don't spikka da a. jlich. Iss anything else, mate ? ” Even a friend can carry the mick too far. He was on the edge with those cracks

“The song is sloppy, Issy, believe you me.”

“So are the demonstrators,” I told him. I don't think I would have been so truthful if I hadn't been provoked. I'm not usually.

“The enemy is over the top. The barricade is breached. So now you must be a cynic.”

“This is Mick's café. You're sitting down eating a cheese roll. No one's been breached. Frank won't show till nine o'clock.”

"They lost another city."

"I know," I said sadly. What was happening in Spain was a tragedy.

"It's tonight, Issy. Look!" He threw a single ticket to Paris across the table. He was holding a cheese roll in his other hand. I knew it was the "this is the last time see for a long time, if ever." The urge to scream "You silly bastard! You wouldn't know a gun from a french letter!" became overwhelming. I remember that, and the cheese roll in his left hand very clearly. I can understand remembering what he said. I always remember the last words of people who matter to me. It's never been a strain. There have been only two. It's remembering that he had the cheese roll in his left hand that puzzles. It's such a silly thing not to forget in twenty-six years.

"You'll starve to death in the midst of plenty," I said. "They don't do cheese rolls with English cheddar in Madrid."

"Do me uh favour, dom be zuch uh smart Alec." The *Daily Worker* headline that morning must have been potent. The clot was grinning.

"You're still not getting it right," I said. "You still need some lessons from the Chief Rabbi."

"Doo shick buh meir uh latter sumtimes, maybe, Issy."

"Ich voller shicken planty latters definut," I promised. I had resigned my job. I was going to get there next month. I didn't tell him this. I like giving my friends surprises. It ought to be legal to hang Smart Alecs.

"They meet us in Paris."

"Cook's have a man in Patagonia."

"They grow cloves in Zanzibar."

"I'll be there to see you off, Johnny," I said. I didn't, though. I got brave at the last minute and funk'd.

"Doing it in style going over — travelling on the Golden Arrow."

"I know a bloke who travels on it often. It's very comfortable he says."

"They have built up a fine organisation."

"You're not joining Franco's mob, Johnny. Say they got an organisation, please, will yuh?" The loon was as happy as the kid who's just belted another kid one in the slats and mummy's laughing. He could have kicked me there. I'd sooner.

"I've always fancied eating a Paella."

"There's a Spanish restaurant in Greek Street that does one for half a crown."

"It's not the same."

"I wouldn't know."

"I'm not frightened, Issy."

"You don't have to be with me," I said, knowing he was scared.

"I'm not. I thought I would be, but I'm not. Isn't it funny?"

"I would be," I said. "I'm not very brave."

"You won't be. You'll be surprised. You don't get frightened when you're sur."

Next month I'd have the answer to that one, then I'd let him know.

"I always get frightened, Johnny. I can't cross the street unless a copper's holding my hand."

"I thought I would be, but I'm not."

Muzeltov, I thought.

"Uh regluh ero yuh iss," I said. "Yuh vant frum meir uh finif phoont scheque."

"Uh gott nuh benkin uccundnt."

"Give over, Johnny," I said. "It's not funny any more."

"I'll take it in pennies," he said. "I've always wanted to collect pennies."

"I'll send you some, I promise."

"She's seeing me off."

I had been waiting for this. I knew Sarah.

"Play it for laughs, like now, Johnny. Sarah goes for you, you ugly bastard," I said, ruffling his untidy mop.

"She did cry a bit, but she promised no waterworks at the station."

He'd better have some towels handy — I knew Sarah.

"Everybody's being so brave. Must be something in the air."

"It's just the time for a trip to Spain."

"The *Worker's* got a weather correspondent now."

"Since when?"

Something was going to pop soon. I couldn't keep this up.

"I'm not frightened. I thought I would be, but I'm not, Isn't it funny?"

"I'm killing myself laughing."

"I'm really not, Issy."

"Eat your fucking cheese roll," I said. "It'll get stale."

It was quiet on the front when a stray bullet hit the tall, gangling, dark-haired, untidy Young Lochinvar, who always stuttered when he was excited. He died with his boots muddy, painfully. Twenty-six years ago the clot caught it, and I still feel him inside with the passion of the lover, knowing the body of his loved one. Freud may have the answer here.

They wrote that your death lit a flame that inspires a vision of the Utopia where the lion will live beside

the jackal in amity and love. Knowing only the betrayal, the obedience to the diktat from the Kremlin, the defence of murder, genocide, the peddlers of the Marxist myth wrote lies to order, when they wrote this. The vision has been kept alive, tended carefully, and today many fight for the wrong because "you" died fighting for the right in Spain. The "La Passionaras" are their mass produced weapons, luring, seducing, cozening, blackmailing, the good, the simple, the corrupt, the seeking, into supporting the Krushchev who danced a kopak for Stalin to save his skin. "It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees," became a cheap sneer when it was spoken by a shoddy creature to order, as Militicianos fought, bare hands against guns, in the streets. Marty, who was a liar, a murderer, and mad, made many speeches, murdered many heroes, at the dictate of his Russian master. Recuperating from the strain of seeing the blood of the dead that splattered the walls of the prison, sentencing others to death, as ordered.

The victims did not join the nightly discussions between Marty and his Russian masters, at which new candidates for martyrdom were chosen. They lay rotting into compost in the gutters. La Passionara made no speeches over their bodies. Murdered Poumists, dissident Communists, honest men sickened, the weak afraid, the strong who spoke loudly, were not worthy of her fine words. "You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs," she would say, when asked. Stalin had made this alibi for murder popular, and one heard it everywhere. Stalin had made it popular. It was safe.

Marty died full of years in his bed. His death being honoured with a moving obituary that took up the front page of *La Humanite*. If what it said was true,

this ex-machinist's mate in the French Navy was a kindly man who loved children, the workers, helping old ladies across the street, and was not the mad, lying murderer that he was. La Passionara preferred not to die with the Militicianos she had inspired into dying bravely, and left for Russia to convalesce from the strain of the many speeches she had made. Unfortunately this lady is not dead. The dead no longer lie rotting in the gutters. Mussolini made the trains of Italy run on time whenever they ran on time. Franco, the cunning El Supremo, who made a Golgotha of his land too, insisted that he should be remembered by the historian as the kindly father of his people, cleared the bodies from the gutters. Dead bodies in the gutters are not a tourist attraction.

It was a strange war, this war of peasant, worker, student, against Fascism, the Roman Catholic church, the rich, the evil. Germans, Italians, and Russians used the country as an armaments testing range. Millions of men and women wept tears as Britain, France, America, non-intervened to help Franco. Poets went forward from Liberalism to save the Republic with words. Writers bled fine phrases from their typewriters. Politicians offered all but their bodies to the struggle. Russia supplied arms against gold, no arms against no gold. The Voice of Republic Spain was waited for, listened to, all over the world. The patch beside the Headman's hut was still as they waited for the radio to come alive with the song. Every evening, tired from the toil in the fields, they gathered to hear the song that told the city still stood, defying, unafraid.

On this evening the song did not come. The next day Yossil, the son of the village storekeeper went into the town to ask why the city had been silent; to be told that the men of the town too, despaired of the city.

There came to the village after Yossil had returned, a man who spoke of the fighting in the far off land of their brothers, of the peasants who died for them, of the new that was becoming in the land of which the city was part. They listened, deeply, as the man spoke. He spoke of what they knew. The harshness of the toil in the fields, the headmen who took what was the birth-right of man, his land; the need to struggle so that the children would become straight, strong, unafraid. They marched with him for many miles as he went on to tell in other villages what was the truth of the city that fought for them.

The fire was built up many times as they talked. Many were angry being afraid. Many were needed to work in the fields if the children were not to hunger. The police would come. Many would be beaten when the police came. The priest has said such men were the anti-Christ. Mjiljas crossed himself as this was said. Others said that the man was an agent of the secret police come to tempt into wrong. The woman of Yossil Gubarnik angered as she called from the hut, "Cowards, you make many words as the city is silent." It was not meant that women should speak of these things. The old man who had known many seasons of toil, and had not broken, then spoke. "They call to us," he said. "The silence is a call we must heed. The old must labour so that the young may travel to the land of the city. The food that we eat will be sour in our mouth if we betray, and we shall be shamed as men."

All listened, for one must respect the old. So it is written. "It will take many days and the police watch everywhere," one who was afraid said. "These are foolish words" said another who was not afraid. "The people in many lands will help those who wish to travel

to the city." Many spoke. When morning came and it was the time again for the toil in the fields, two had been chosen to travel to the land of the City that was silent.

Yossil Gubarnik, who had refused to worship in the synagogue of his people, and Dinar, the son of the old man who had spoken, were the chosen from the young of the village. The men marched with them for many miles until the time came to return to the toil in the fields, and the women who waited.

They crossed the frontier secretly in the night. They crossed many frontiers secretly in the night. They hungered often. The cold chilled. The sound of the night made fear as they burrowed into the soil seeking warmth. Yossil and Dinar had marched many days before they crossed the frontier into the land of the City, and they need no longer fear the teeth of the rat, the whine of the wind, the footsteps in the dark.

Yossil Gubarnik, a crude creature with atrocious table manners my dear, died fighting with the International Brigade on the night they saved Madrid. Anti-fascist man, erect, proud, brushed the slime of subservience to fear and evil from his back, in the halls, lecture rooms, laboratories, of the University City on this night. It was a good night for a man to die. The night when the anti-fascist workers, peasants, students from many lands marched into the labyrinth of death unafraid, singing the Internationale, was a good night for a man to die.

Dinar was among the few who lived through this night. When the morning came he and the others who had survived marched proudly past the thousands who had come to honour the living among those who had stemmed the fascist avalanche to save the city. He rose to be a captain in the International Brigade. At

Guardalajara, when for once there were tanks enough, planes enough, planning enough, to give the Republic an even chance, he helped to drive Mussolini's Legion back and then rout them. Wounded in the leg during this battle he learned to enjoy the Paella of Valencia while his wound healed. From Valencia he entrained for the Catalan front. Here he fought in many of the battles where anarchist indiscipline, Communist, Poumist rivalry, deprived the Catalans of the victories that should have been their's. When the army of General Yague, aided by German and Italian planes, armour and men, broke through to the sea, Dinar led his men across the Pyrenees to interment in the concentration camp of Argeles. They came to the gates a disciplined body of men, carrying their arms, singing the Internationale, to be maltreated by Senegalese guards as they entered the camp.

A cowardly French government, embarrassed by the presence of men within its borders, prepared to fight Fascism, sent Dinar and many others to slave labour in the Sahara. After four months of maltreatment by the pro-Cagoulard guards, much hunger and thirst, he escaped to join with the men of the F.L.N. fighting the French Army to a standstill. The tout for the whores of Strasbourg Street, Denis, the whining shit, bumming a franc from drunken American tourists, the peddler of filthy postcards, the pusher of drugs I met in a Montparnasse cafe, was an obscene parody of the hero he had been. The Nazi-Soviet Treaty of Non-aggression had broken and the post-war shifts, lies and power politics of the bonces in the Kremlin had completely destroyed what had given Dinar dignity and meaning, Johnny.

Neither the blitz or the passage of the years has succeeded in putting Micks out of business. He still sells

his undercooked, tomato ketchup saturated spaghetti, a penny cheaper than the sleezy cafe round the corner, Johnny. Cups of tea still come in cracked, dirty cups, still bearing traces of lipstick round the edges. Food is still served on greyish, grease-marked 'Woolworth's Doulton.' The chips that come with the egg or the sausage, are the same soft, slimy, inedible, dyspepsia-producers that you ate, Johnny. The atmosphere is still futile, anarchic, appealing. Bearded salesmen for Utopia Unlimited (beards are the sign that the wearer rejects the unimportant to conform in what matters these days, Johnny) sit at the tables whining of the need to demolish this, create that, unaware that their coffees grow cold as they spout crap. The passing of the years and the death of the heroes has changed one thing: the badges they wear differ from those we knew and wore. The nature of the protest has changed and new symbols need to be worn. Today it's the yearly ramble from Aldermaston to London, the pretty young actress buttressing the pavement with her arse. A vulpine clergyman leading a motley mob of do-gooders nowhere, a writer sending fiery letters to *Tribune* from the luxury of the South of France. the Gilliatts, the Tynans, the gynomanderphic dwarfs of the Royal Court, that seduces into futility, Johnny.

Sarah took the news of your death very hard. It was all of six days before she invited me to share her bed, Johnny. She kept calling "Johnny, Johnny," when she was underneath, back arched. putting it in. It didn't stop her suggesting a repeat performance any night I was free. She must have thought that having mine inside brought you closer to her—I don't think. This shoddy one-night stand that began with "nice to see you again. I've been wondering whether I should, but I've been so busy catching up on things," and finished

up with a wash out in a kitchen sink, gave purpose to the death of an idealistic, young idiot I worshipped. Being alive to enjoy the love bites, the fondling, of the lass who called your name as she threshed in pleasurable agony under me, gave posthumous dignity to your death that justified its pointlessness, while curing me of decency, too.

A chap reciting some poetry to impress, a young man leaning over a table loving the girl he hopes to seduce with his eyes, the odd book on the Thirties by a hack who never knew the Thirties that I read for comic relief, all bring you back. I live. Therefore I can. Remember Rene Descartes, Johnny? I wish it had been me not Yossil Gubarnik who died that night in the University City, Johnny. I wish that very much.

Chapter Nine

FROM FIVE THOUSAND THROATS came "Protest against Fascism, Hunger, and War," almost shattering my eardrums. "Get out of this bloody mob, double quick, mate," I told myself. Sticking my head in a gas oven was a better way of dealing with my leisure time than this. The indestructible solidity of the Embankment buildings, the cheap jack look of the Bordello of words that has Big Ben as a trademark, and the White Collars scurrying with the decorum of an army of camels on the rampage, convinced suicide is justified, very convincingly.

"I'm bleeding well tired of being slogan fodder. There's nothing that says I gotta be, Dick. Stalin isn't my father. I don't have to admire the murderous bastard. That's your pigeon." For once, there was total sincerity as I told a friend some home truths. Johnny's death, and the murder of Poumists by communist gunmen, demanded honesty and no dissembling. Yet, here I was among them after my brave words. There should be a law, a punitive law, that punishes the weak shit determinted not to do, who does at the plea of a friend, despite Mr. E. M. Forster. Monty's "A demonstration supplies the vital protein that the Ids, Yids and Zids of the maladjusted Left must have. That's why the Party leadership calls so many and it's standing room only for all late-comers, Spinoza," was so obviously true it made me angry. Angry enough to shout, "Save it for the Royal Society, wise guy," and leave him standing looking hurt. Hearing "I told you

so but you wouldn't listen," when he learned I had left the march before it began wouldn't make "I'm sorry, Monty," easier to say. I was staying. I was married to that mob until arrival in Hyde Park did us part. If I was lucky there might be an unattached *kleine sthick peyrick* in the line. You never know till you start hunting. It could be an ill wind that blew "short time for you, mate," if it was my lucky day.

Watching the White Collars stealing surreptitious looks, and blushing when caught. Seeing the tightly furled umbrellas, the one-size-too-small bowler jammed tight on the napper, the drabness of the colour and cut of their suits, the panache with which they wore minor public school ties, showed that shouting slogans wouldn't help Russia or us. They weren't interested in any protest that did not add an inch of their neighbour's garden to their's. An invitation to a Buckingham Palace tea party, a mention in the gossip column of the local weekly, the chance to kiss a bigwig's arse, could win them for whatever the upper-uppers wanted them for. They would not be won for the social protest on moral, amoral, or immoral grounds ever. They were too insulated by their mortgages and weekly bridge parties to be able to feel. Newspapers have given a great deal of their space to convincing them that they are the salt of the earth. The Press Lords have been made up to Barons because their hirelings have done it so well. The English Uncle Ednas have the kind of government they deserve. Ten more years should see us listed with Patagonia as a minor dependency of the United States. The Communist party can never win these boyos or con them. They had the English backbone and character they had been told they had, where their brain cells would have been if they'd had brain cells. Stupidity is a

strong weapon that protects from the smart alec selling phoney panaceas and it would save them and our fair land. Good more often comes out of bad, than out of good, thank goodness.

Flourishing yellow armbands, the marshals ran up and down shouting instructions that cancelled themselves out. Following them came the cheer-leaders with the list of slogans for shouting. After them came the minions who had the job of vetting the banners for size, shape and political proclivities of the groups they advertised. Communist Party demonstrations masquerading as Anti-Fascist ones were well overseered.

The slogans that had been chosen could have been shouted by a Call Girl or a Cabinet Minister without a loss of face. This made the crime of the clot shouting "Joanna Southcott's box is a Stalinist conspiracy," even more heinous than the rape of a dead centenarian. He was frog-marched to a policeman without a protest. He had blasphemed and he deserved what he got. Since it was a first offence, and the magistrate had played golf with the father, he was lectured paternally and fined a fiver or fourteen days. A clot never learns. Politicians thank God for this every night when they say their prayers. "I'd sooner do a year in Dartmoor than listen to that longwinded shit again," was scarcely a tactful thing to tell the Courtroom Sergeant. A month later you never would have known he'd been bashed about.

"Arise ye starvelings from your slumbers.

Arise ye criminals of want

For reason in revolt now thunders

And at last ends the age of cant "

belted out loudly, tuneless, by four thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine straining vocal chords told

the world that we were off toward Hyde Park at last. Onward, grim, determined, out of step, we plodded. Ready to give an inch of leather sole to the cause. "Down with Fascism," we roared. "Long live the United Front," we screamed. "Chamberlain must go," we screeched. Even for the best of causes a throat can take just so much.

Thanks to the benevolent neutrality of the police, and the stupidity of our marshals, the route agreed went round and round in gradually increasing, not decreasing concentric circles and was not able to disappear up its own arsehole.

Two hours of plod, plod, and my bladder threatened to burst. I dived into the nearest lavatory determined to relieve the counter-revolutionary pressure. The alternative was to remain and get pinched for indecent exposure. Mar cannot live for principle alone, and I left the ranks without an apology to the Chief Marshal. "If you have a discharge don't hesitate to report to your nearest hospital. Treatment is secret," is not the type of poster that should be sprayed with urine. The lout who had swung around giggling to spray should have known that acts of this character didn't do the cause of the workers any good. The lavatory attendant did, and, if he had caught the lout, murder would have been done and the *Worker* would have had something else to whine about on the front page. "The disgusting bastard," I told everyone in the lavatory. Everybody was too busy grinning to agree with this statement.

Back in the street I let myself have the grin I'd bottled up. After I had wiped my eyes sore I tagged on to the Oxford University October Club contingent that was marching by. I knew several of them vaguely. The filthy stories they told were farmyard filthy and there

is nothing I like better than a barnyard joke, told without false modesty. Whatever else those boyos had they didn't have any modesty, false or otherwise. I liked them. I had a pretty good idea joining them would be a ball. It was.

All the way down Park Lane we blew raspberries and cat-called the useless slobs staring from the windows of their luxurious houses. Today I regret this rudeness. These people do only a maximal amount of harm being alive.

Thanks to the efforts of the police on point duty, it took just over two hours to complete the three miles. Without waiting for dismissal everyone dived into Lyons' Corner House for a cup of tea or coffee. Had Hitler known of this breach of revolutionary discipline he would have landed an army at the Port of London, paid the port dues, and taken them to the Ritz for lunch. The number of the rich there waiting to greet their deliverer would have been a surprise. It is the poor, with nothing to defend, who die for the liberties they have been told they have. The wealthy, having money, understanding that money alone makes them different, make admirable Fifth Columnists and survive richer still.

No service after an hour of waiting for the waitress produced an anger with Capitalism that would remain genuine until I had a cup of tea. Walking toward the Park, thirst unassuaged, I knew the anger that comes to the man aware that he is a victim of Capitalist inhumanity, but unable to do more than protest verbally. There could be no other explanation than a failing by Capitalism to explain the failure of the three waitresses to supply a rowdy mob with the food and drink they rudely demanded. The overworked waitresses had aroused my sympathy. The rowdy, rude, mob had

aroused my distaste. Learning that within the psyche of the Communist there lurks the sadiſtic callousness of the Prussian sergeant major awaiting the moment he can fasten the electrodes to your balls and pull the switch and get a medal, is always unpleasant.

With its usual strength of character, the United Front Committee had chosen the speakers the Communist Party had told them to choose. No consideration had been given to the feelings of those opposing Fascism on moral, non-political grounds. No consideration was given to their feelings at any time. These worthwhile simpletons were allowed to march, contribute funds, but they were not allowed to disrupt the arrangements the amoral political objectors to Fascism made. My late wife, a Quaker, was a very worthwhile simpleton and because I loved her dearly during her life, love her dearly now that she is dead, and respect the integrity and humanity with which she dealt with people, I hope that one day there will truly be a Jerusalem in England's green and then pleasant land. I do not think it will come, but I would be pleased if I were wrong. People like Olive deserve a better world than the one our cowardice toward evil, our inertia toward the good, our respect for the blue-blooded corrupt, has made.

The Chairman of the demonstration meeting in Hyde Park was a wealthy businessman of Liberal proclivities who only fellow-travelled first-class. A religious smartie, who peddled a noxious amalgam of Marx and St. John that horrified, was the star speaker. Willowy Archie, a tall, tastefully-dressed and made up, hard to take poseur came next on the bill. This aesthete, made like a parnassian, even while busy on the job, I had been told by Jane, a nymphomaniac ugly I'd met in the Fitzroy and not met, again by design. "He's about as good a poet as I am and I've never written a line of

poetry in my life," was another of the compliments she had paid to him that evening. Jane was a vicious, perpetually sneering, creature and I do not place much credence on her character assessment of Willowy Archie. I do know that he play-acted. "I'm as bent as a corkscrew, my dear," to embarrass the genuinely homosexual. I do place some credence on that, the slimy turd. Last but not most on the bill was blotchy-skinned, pimply, dewlap-breasted, tubby Hannah. This duck could charm money from an Armenian for a Turkish charity and was well worth the rake-off she took. Aside from the lack of principle they had in common, all four offered to sign autograph books before being asked.

"I can't stand the Chairman," I told the pretty blonde I'd been giving a lascivious once-over in depth.

"I'm not interested," she replied, "and experts have tried and failed."

"Sorry Mavis," I was a little put out and was determined to let her see that. Life is going to be impossible if pretty blonde pieces can read minds. "Me not that hard up," I told her. "Just want squaw woman answer question."

"Drop dead creep," was the answer I got to this legitimate desire to know. Things definitely have changed for the worse since women got the vote.

"Get stuffed duchess." It seemed a reasonable suggestion if she wouldn't let me stuff her. I moved away when I saw the look on her face. She might carry her annoyance too far and there were lots of coppers about.

It took a little while for the stewards to hush us enough for the Chairman to begin the proceedings. He began: "I know you are waiting to hear the other speakers"; then spouted overt propaganda for the U.S.S.R. for over an hour. The easily-bored bloke who

screeched "The Spanish workers needs arms not bad speeches," was frogmarched out, head down, by the stewards. The Chairman did not permit this to disturb. No politician is ever disturbed by an affront to the dignity of others. "You know why we are here today," he went on, "the Spanish people have been defeated. People go hungry everywhere outside the U.S.S.R." Another chap with a low toleration point for the lie shouted, "You stupid, lying, bastard." He also paid the penalty. The stewards would be working up a sweat if this sort of interruption multiplied. "Everyone but the gentleman who had just left," some clots giggled here, "owe the length of their struggle to the aid given to them so freely by the Soviet Union." I still despise myself for not spitting at him for this whopper. "This help could not have been given if the Russians had not overfulfilled their five-year plan by seventeen per cent." We really were being given the munchausen. "The people of Spain were inspired by the freedom that the Russian revolution brought to the workers and peasants of Russia."

Not a very inspiring thing to inspire, I thought, but quietly. "I must have quite a yellow streak down the middle of my genes that no-one could do anything about, to be such a cowardly 'hit," was another thought I had quietly. "The *Daily Worker* is the only newspaper owned by its readers," he went on lying. "It is the only one that always tells the truth, no matter how unpalatable to the Capitalists that truth may be." Not all in the audience were morons and there was some laughter at the somewhat half-sided version of what is truth we had just been given. Mr. Religious Smartie came over to whisper in his ear. The Chairman then introduced him with a fulsomeness that nauseated:

Then sat down to loud cheering that drowned the few boos.

Mr. Religious Smartie was a wiser slimy than the Chairman and he played us with a finer line. "At my meeting with Stalin," he began, "he assured me that there was no anti-semitism in Russia and all religious groups were free to worship in their own way in specially supplied buildings." "What about the Slave Camps?" a voice called. "No, leave him," he told the stewards, "I'll deal with him." He did an efficient job with a little half lying. "There are no Slave Camps in Russia. This story has been put out by the people who failed to defeat Russia by force of arms in 1921, young man." There were Slave Camps, but he did have a point. So much of the stuff on Russia came from interested parties with lands, jewellery and social positions to recover. I did not think he had a point when he got on to Spain. "Spain is the battleground of Christian ideals," he said. "Were Christ alive, he would be fighting side-by-side with his Communist brothers." The Christs I met in Spain were admittedly Quakers but they wouldn't touch the Communists with an unsterilised barge pole. Quakers don't like them. "The Chairman has told you that the Soviet Union has overfulfilled the five-year plan by seventeen per cent. The growing strength of Russia is our only hope."

Now came the clasped hands and the hushed voice that had gained him the nickname "Praying Mantis." He must have been a riot at funerals. "A service for the dead of Spain will be held on Sunday in this park. Mr. George Smith has promised to attend to read the lesson and the names of those who laid down their lives in our struggle." There were cheers, boos, and some shocked "Ahs" from the crowd. Mr. George Smith was a Communist functionary lately in the news

for financial finagling with union funds. "Lenin will come to St. Paul," he told the crowd, grinning. "He will be welcomed as a brother." "And eaten up!" came from someone at the back. This heckler was frog-marched out, head down. Mr. Religious Smartie's charity toward interrupters was limited, it appeared. The "Their voices will not be stilled by death," with which he ended this essay in the hypocritical double-talk, was greeted with riotous applause. Many raised their arms in the Red Front salute and sang the Internationale. I did nothing, being nothing.

"Willowy Archie must be drunk or sick," I thought, as he came forward swaying, a silly grin marring those classic features. "Brothers and sisters," he began. His value lay in being not of the Communist Party, and he never used "Comrade" when opening. "If you could have seen the sun glistening on the bodies moving forward, you, too, would have been moved to poetry." Someone or something must have upset him badly. He was on the homo kick. "One day I will immortalise that scene in a verse that communicates utterly visions of the beauty seen and the awe that is known seeing." Someone or something must have upset him badly. The chairman was giving him some uncomradely looks. "The transmutation of being that is made by courage makes the higher being who has been the inspiration of great art since history began."

The heckler's: "Kiss me, Charley, up the leg of me drawers, sweetie," the cheers and laughter that had greeted this not very funny remark, and the stewards' lack of retaliatory action as he repeated it, showed that Willowy Archie was not quite the type of speaker they were going to ask for his autograph.

"I loved the bodies of the workers and peasants of

Spain, with their sun-burnished brownness and their rippling muscles."

He certainly was smearing it thick. It must have been someone pretty big or something pretty bad. The next day I learned that it was a bit of both. The chairman had refused to let the bloody prima donna speak first. There was a little applause and plenty of booing as he ended with: "They inspire with desire to touch, to hold, to belong to."

"The young ones or old ones, Archie boy?" from a heckler met with tremendous applause and gusts of laughter. Willowy Archie was grinning as Hannah came forward and said something that could not have been loving. It wasn't, for, when the chairman said something, he just walked off the platform.

Hannah did well the job she was paid well to do. The collection reached a total of over two hundred pounds. Possibly fifty pounds of it would be spent as the people contributing thought the whole would be spent. These fakers took nearly as big a rake off as the organisers of Charity balls to cover expenses. Still, with a bit of luck, fifty pounds would be spent for the purpose for which it had been given, and the purpose was good.

A seaman would go ashore. The fear he felt would show in the tenseness of his body, very clearly. Out of the darkness of the narrow dockside alley would come the man, also afraid, but hiding his fear well. Money and leaflets would change hands. The seaman would return to his ship, not so afraid now that it was done. The man would return to the comrades waiting for the knock on the door that meant the Gestapo and the torture in the cellars as the black-uniformed animals laughed. We who had given would sleep well, having given. The man and his comrades would move, afraid,

silent, through the night to chalk "Gegen Fascismus Und Kreig" on many walls as we slept well, having given. Mr. Religious Smartie would also sleep well, knowing that the money we had given had paid for the genuine Havana cigar smoked after the rich meal, for which we had also paid, and that there was plenty more to come as long as we continued to give to the man and his comrades who move, afraid, silent, to chalk "Gegen Fascismus Und Kreig" on many walls. This Vicar of God would sleep well knowing this. The Lord be praised for His infinite mercy and grace to all unworthy of that infinite mercy and grace. Hallelujah ! Amen.

Monty was kind, and it was not as hard as I had thought it would be to say: "Sorry, Monty, I shouldn't have been such a pig." The girl who had told me to drop dead I never saw again. Mr. Religious Smartie, the Chairman, Willowy Archie and Hannah, I met many times under many faces and many names. The man and his comrades who moved, afraid, silent, to chalk "Gegen Fascismus Und Kreig" on many walls, to whom I gave gladly, I never knew. The vision of a world in which men will live in amity with other men, sharing what they have to share, for which Yossil Gubarnik, Johnny and many others have died, has been debased and can no longer be. But not by them, never by them."

Chapter Ten

THE WHOLE WORLD knows Ernie is a big, fat, anti-semitic slob, but they do have Bevan as well. *Das Capital* does not say "love Herbie, fix it when no one's voting, like a brother"; it says the opposite. "You are a first-generation nebbish, not a dowager duchess: don't ask for the moon." They do have Socialists to leaven the shit; not many maybe, but some. Join — don't join — but do something. Otherwise you will make a café philosopher useless. We have a ninety-mile-an-hour gale, but the Communists don't get off the ground. These random lunacies do represent the drift of mind that afflicted while I debated — I will, I will not, join the Labour Party. Ever since my sixteenth birthday I had been aware that the only answer to the problems afflicting our society that made sense and would work was Socialism. Until the signing of the Nazi-Soviet treaty of non-aggression, the Communist Party had been the mother and father of my political ideals. I had believed in them absolutely, justified their shifts of line, excused their lies, and refused to believe what they told me not to believe. The honeymoon was over. They had stripped themselves and shown the scrawny, shabby foundation. My stupidity had become manifest. Either I betrayed what had forced me to reject their indecency or I found another home of dreams I could accept. The quarter-loaf is better than no loaf when you're hungry.

I decided to join the Labour Party. It is better to work from within than without, I told myself. I should

have had my head examined. The effort to make a collection of middle-class wide boys, selfish trade unionists, and worthwhile simpletons into a body of disciplined Socialists, going somewhere, has killed better men than yours truly — and Keir Hardie was only one of them.

To join the rank-and-file as a card-carrying member, dedicated to fighting for a Labour Government that would dedicate itself to looking after the boys, was the easiest thing in the world. I only had to fill in a form, pay the membership secretary six shillings, and answer some personal, bloody silly questions. The Labour Party had got into such a tizzy about admitting the ex-Communist that it had forgotten — if it ever thought to remember, that is — that year by year it is becoming more and more the Party the ex-Communist wouldn't be seen dead joining.

On the third Thursday of each month, our Constituency Labour Party had its monthly group therapy session. It was held in a hall large enough to garage the "Queen Mary." Each member was sent a copy of the Agenda and a Notice of Meeting ten days before. As there were six hundred members and only a dozen — the same dozen — ever bothered to attend, I suggested that sending out these notices at a cost of threepence each was not the way to keep solvent. "It's always been done this way," the chairman told me, grinning. I shut up. It was their money. Their time. I was a new member. There were bigger issues to go to town over. How right I was.

Attendance at these meetings — I never missed — taught that when the rank-and-file were not wanted for the chores — distributing leaflets, flogging football coupons, standing outside polling booths, canvassing and getting out the voters — no one wanted to know

them. When the chores needed doing there was nothing too good for the worthy yolds. I even heard — I can't vouch for the accuracy — that a successful candidate in a difficult marginal constituency was so overcome by victory he called a rank-and-filer by his first name. I must emphasise that I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this.

The preceding paragraph describes the rank-and-file member who lacks the wherewithal to subsidise the campaigns the upper echelons run to get themselves some sort of public office. If you had the lolly to spare for bad causes, there was the friendship of the upper echelons for the paying, and the promotion from the ranks for the asking.

The ungrading of the wealthy lowly to middle estate in the hierarchy was, as were the selections for the Executive Committee, the nominations for the school boards, the choosing of the delegates for the various conferences, always done openly, honestly, in the democratic manner so conspicuously English. The selection had, in accordance with the so, so conspicuously English democratic manner, already been made in the saloon bar of the Golden Lion, by those competent to choose. It was still a good show and no one should knock the political party that puts on a good show with no extra charge. I have been a Labour Party secretary. I know how I got the job. It cost almost five pounds for beer, and almost seven for loans I could whistle goodbye. I know how a number of people got started on their meteoric careers and not all the perfume a public relations slimy can spread out will stop them stinking as human beings. I do not say the Tories are better. I know they are worse. I was friendly with a prostitute who serviced some politicians and, man, if half was true, obscenity thy middle name is Tory,

Labour, and when we get some Liberal M.P's, Liberal.

Campaigns that will lead to the Labour Government that will govern Bow Group costs. The large staff at Transport House costs, my it costs. The conferences held at home and abroad, that give the big boys their chance to read the speeches written for them—that's why they're held — cost. The local Labour Parties are expected to sweat and find the money for these necessities of a leadership on the make, as well as raise the money to fight campaigns that will put into Parliament and the council chamber people who do not differ from their opponents in ambition, and corruption.

These campaigns tend to attract the wide boy who likes spending other people's money on his political ambitions. Since they can talk fast and con well they start as favourites before selection committees. It has been argued that the brand of Labour M.P. we have does more to make socialism impossible than the activities of the Russian and British Communist Parties, but, since the people who say this are socialists, no Labour M.P. will accept this as true.

The local Labour Party is the sum of its officers and they are almost always the councillors, the delegates to the various conferences, and Justices of the Peace, as well. The chairman and treasurer of the local party I joined served the public, with honour and distinction and a few perks, as their elected representatives to the local authority. Next year, please God, we would win another seat and the secretary would get his chance to serve. Another ten years and who knows, the whole executive would be rising in the council chamber to make maiden speeches.

The two who served did a pretty fair job. They never grafted when it was unsafe. Always attacked projects that were unpopular. Consistently protested against the

rise in the rate when their opposition meant plenty of publicity. Were very friendly with their Tory opposite numbers. Spent too much time trying to get publicity for themselves. The two were average specimens the public deserved.

The chairman was the selfless, dedicated, type who always made a success of whatever he touched that was yours. Sleek, forty-fivish and trying his best to hide it, owner of his own home and a sinecure on the expense account range, he would have been at home in the Fascist Party. Even the men who sell the rancid, slut-tish, starlets as actresses would have found him hard to take neat. Ambition, naked, stinking, and obvious, sickens even the cobra. Desmond was a vulpine, hail fellow you never wish to meet, with the usual wife, kids, and short-time contracts. A generous man he always enjoyed making donations with other people's money before large audiences. His dentifrice smile was his trade mark and it must have taken a lot of practice to get it that phony. No one had ever accused him of selling his sister to a Port Said brothel. He didn't have a sister.

Given the low standards that must be used when discussing people in political life, the secretary wasn't quite such a turd. Feeble, gutless and a gas bag I might have been, but I did believe in socialism. My trouble was self pity and I had been known to cry in my beer during a crisis. I could have used a little guts but they can't be bought at Woolworths. I made do yapping ideals for the future while accepting the obscenity of the present.

"There isn't anything that this constituency Labour Party can do," the chairman told the meeting.

I had raised the issue of the South African Labour Party and its refusal to accept non-white members

while being affiliated to the Socialist International. The, we must take action, we cannot take action, what business is it of ours, debate had been raging for ten minutes when the chairman pronounced the thumbs down. I was mad enough to forget to be scared. "Either we send a resolution to annual conference or we shut up shop as a Labour Party," I told the whole bloody crew. In those days I liked to think words convinced if they were socialist words. I believed in the annual conference as a force for making policy too. I was a fool on both counts.

"Let us get the constitutional position clear." The sell-out fluffed out in the chairman's handbook of constitutional procedure was coming. That bastard only wanted issues clarified when clarifying them got them lost. "The secretary tells us that the South African Labour Party is all white and feels that we should complain of this to the annual conference." Sincerity shone from the pig-like eyes. The sell-out was coming gift package wrapped. "This may be so but", if I didn't know him I would have given him sixpence, "this does not mean that they have not the interests of the non-white at heart. There is more than one way of skinning a cat and", we got the dentifrice teeth splitting the thick lips, "the hotheaded way is not the best one. We do not wish to harm a fellow Labour Party by acting rashly." Again that dentifrice smile; the stiletto was poised, I was for the knifing, "Our Jewish members do sometimes get over-excited when a cool head is best."

"Leave the Jews to Mosley," I told him, not giving a bugger for the constitutional handbook, "he'll do a better job of working them over." "I shall rule that remark out of order." I hadn't got under his skin as I had hoped to do to have a real barney.

"Let's put it to the members," I said. "They pay subscriptions. They have a right to a say sometimes."

"The local elections come up in six weeks. Can't it wait until after then?" one of the chairman's cronies called from the rear of the hall. He was on the panel of the chosen that time. The seat couldn't be won but he was on the panel, and hope dies hard.

"This is more important than worrying about you and your bloody seat on the council," I told him. "You haven't an earthly, you clot. That's why they picked you." I hadn't liked the "bleeding Jew," he had shouted out and if he wanted a poke in the nose I was ready.

"The brother is at liberty to think as he pleases." Voltaire had found himself a new home in the chairman's vocal chords. "This is a democratic party. The ward does not have to agree with him. We are a branch of the Labour Party here not South Africa. Interfering in matters we know very little of is not what we were set up to do." He must have been raging to have come out in the open that way. "I move the next business," another stooge, who did the hatchet jobs when lover-boy wanted clean hands, called from the rear of the hall. I don't know why his toadies always sat at the back but they did. The membership secretary moved into the firing line. He certainly surprised the chairman. This was mutiny, sir. "Let's ask the secretary to draft a resolution which we can vote on," he said. The look the chairman gave him must have been borrowed from Dracula. I couldn't stop grinning. It looked as if the bastard was for the skids. The miracle of miracles.

Never under-estimate a politician. Quite a number of people have learned that the hard way to their cost. This evening showed I was one of them. "The constitution does not allow us to accept a resolution from

the body of the hall unless it is an emergency one. If the black man has not been admitted to membership of the South African Labour Party it was not done yesterday. As this resolution can be dealt with at any time I cannot allow a resolution to be put." The bastard said all this, face split with the dentifrice smile. He had me bollixed right, left and centre and he was having fun playing the constitutional malarky.

"You don't like Negroes," I told him angrily. "Say it, don't wrap it up in a lot of bollacks." I was determined to provoke him and kick his pearly molars down his throat.

"I did my duty as a chairman." He wasn't going to rise. "You have no cause to be insulting." I should have smacked the slime in the teeth then. I would have done if only I had some guts.

"I'm putting a resolution," I said.

"I'm calling next business."

"I said I was putting a resolution." I was mad enough by now to have fought the whole bloody shoot. The membership secretary's "Can a resolution be placed on the agenda for next month's meeting?" offered the honourable retreat I should have refused. Next month the cronies would be out in full pack ready to vote 'no' before the resolution had been moved. Local elections were important. The negro pushing his oppression under your nose could go jump in an ice-cold bath. That way we would get socialism the trade unions would support. They didn't like people who demanded rights for negroes when it meant a negro might become a foreman because he deserved to. It was all over. The battle was lost. I had been out-gunned, out-generalled, made to lose my temper, and got nowhere. The chairman was smart. It was an even

money bet he would make the Cabinet in a Labour Government.

"Excuse me," I said as I stood up, "I don't want to be sick all over you."

I was wiping the sickness from my jacket and looking at the mess on the floor when the membership secretary put his arm round my shoulder and led me out. "It doesn't help," he said, "you've got to learn to swallow or get out."

"You've got a better stomach. That rotten, slimy turd . . ."

"I've called him worse," he said, grinning.

"I feel so bloody helpless." There was self-pity in my voice.

"Feeling sorry for yourself doesn't help, either."

"I know that but I can't help it," I told him, with even greater self pity.

"You can only fight with the material there is."

"That bastard is the material there is."

"You must learn to work with him for your ends."

"I'm not that rich." I was beginning to feel a little better. I even managed to half grin with this.

"He told me he has a number of negro and Jewish friends but there is a right way to do things." I liked the twinkle in his eyes as he said this.

"His way ?"

"Come on" he said, pulling me back into the hall, "show them."

No one said a word as I sat down and took the Minutes book from the chairman. I had put on an exhibition. I was a Jew. They were kindly men who never bore malice. I was a lucky man to be allowed to sit in the same hall with them.

Ron, the membership secretary, who had helped me to recover was a strange, unsympathetic, but very honest

man, who lived in a strange, private world with admission barred. Negro lassies attracted everything within that gave him sexual meaning, but he would have died sooner than admit to this. Yet he would never practice a colour bar and was a better fighter for decency in relationships between peoples of different colour than professional negro lovers. When his daughter brought a Nigerian student home for tea one Sunday he made the student welcome but asked the daughter not to bring him again. Yet he would not have stopped her marrying that Nigerian even though he would have hated that. A torn, tortured always by this, honest, kindly, fighter for equal rights for the negro, despite his repulsion. A repulsion that was controlled with an effort that was pitiable, obvious and very brave. I liked him for his honesty. Respected him for his integrity. And would have trusted my life to him although I knew that he thought my ideas strange, unhealthy and things to be fought. A good man groping toward the light, dominated by a concept of decency. This land could use many more of his calibre.

After my return the meeting droned on with everyone thinking twice before saying anything. At 9.22 p.m. — it is strange that I should remember something as unimportant as this for nineteen years, I appealed for some money to be sent to the family of a negro who had been blinded by a policeman's baton in a small American town bus station. The chairman allowed this for discussion under 'any business' for reasons I do not understand. The speech that led to my resignation as secretary was made during the discussion as to 'yea' or 'nay'. I do not think I shall ever forget the unctuous, whining, cockney voice saying those terrible things. Whenever I wish to lay down the stone of kinship with the negro and all oppressed

people that I bear, I hope that that cockney voice whining its scurrilities comes to mind, and I have driven home that to do this makes my socialism a lie and me a thing unclean.

"Hang on," the small man in the cloth cap, who was the delegate of the Transport and General Workers' Union began. "None of yer as ad ter werk wiff dem blackies. It's easy ter talk when yer aint. No one says nuffink abart dem cummin ere pinchin ahr jobs, undercuttin der rate. Dey all got bleeden flash cars. Oy ain't got one. It ain't good enuff. Ain't we got enuff bleeden furriners ere nahr niffahrt giffin munney to sum nigger wat arsked fur wat e gort." He obviously enjoyed the applause he was given as he sat down.

The chairman had shushed several interrupters, and it was thanks to him the little rat was able to finish. And now he told us why. "The Labour Party does not tolerate racial prejudice among its members," he said. "It does not deny membership to any man who is eligible." He gave me a sly grin as he said this and I got the point. "On the other hand," he continued, "we have a duty to protect labour standards from erosion by negroes unfortunately not able to appreciate what the workers have built. I can assure the speaker," and he smiled toward his seat, "that we all intend to protect our women folk. I am sorry to have to admit that the sexual habits of many of the negroes who come to these shores leave much to be desired." I didn't interrupt. We had an appointment he didn't know about after the meeting. "I now propose to call for a vote. The secretary has proposed that a sum of money be sent to a negro family in the United States, and," again that dentifrice smile, "although my remarks may be held to have been out of order, a chairman is sometimes", again the thick lips were split and the pearly

molars flashed, "forced to break the rules to explain what is meant. The vote will be by show of hands."

Two, myself and the membership secretary, voted that the sum of ten pounds should be sent. Two, the obscenity who had spoken and a busman who was a friend of his, voted against any action that meant sending money or expressing support. Seven members abstained, and persisted, despite an appeal from the chairman to get him off the hook. Forced to take a stand he voted against.

I waited for him for two hours after the meeting was over but he was cute, and went home with a body-guard. I let myself be talked out of breaking his neck the next day. As the membership secretary put it, "You can't murder every pig in the Labour movement, there are too many." I don't think it was cowardice, for I would willingly have swung for that bastard.

I posted my resignation as secretary on my way to the station the next morning.

Chapter Eleven

WITHIN AN HOUR of having learned that his condition was responding to treatment, Morris Segal an aged, unwanted, husband, idiotic idealist, worthwhile weakling, permanent unemployable, and my father, succumbed to a compulsion to die, grown strong enough to overwhelm his fear of death.

"Come at once," the matron insisted, "it's urgent." "Matron, you know I've been barred." Unless a bout of amnesia had struck this news wouldn't come as a surprise. "It's my mother you should be calling." She had hurt a great deal when she wrote "should you call you will not be admitted." Her refusal to reply to my letter protesting, had hurt still more.

"Your mother hasn't a telephone." She was almost screaming. "The police have been notified."

"Is he dead?" This seemed a safe question to put. Father's last letter had almost begged that someone have pity and kill him.

"Come at once," she repeated, ignoring my question. "It's urgent."

"I'll leave right away," I told her, and replaced the receiver. I'd know soon enough anyway.

It took almost an hour to get to the Vallance Old People's Home in which father had been dumped three years before and from which I had been barred a year before. The journey could have been done in twenty minutes, but I wanted to be sure he was dead and not still in the throes of dying when I arrived. A man merits privacy as his life ebbs away. The Moishe

in the world of Archies and Reggies, who has known only unemployment, bug-ridden beds in sleezy rooms, discouragement and sneers as his lot, merits this doubly.

"I'm Israel Segal," I told the uniformed porter at the enquiry desk. "The matron wants to see me."

"I've been waiting for you to arrive." The oleaginous, hypocritic sadness of the man who is glad that it wasn't he who has been called unto the maker, but needs to hide that, was in his voice and the "He died peacefully in his sleep," confirmed, didn't tell, that father was dead. Thanks unto Baal and Jehovah he did not preface the schmaltz with "I am afraid I have some bad news for you," for the "He died peacefully in his sleep" is as much phoneyess as I can take at a sitting. Why hospitals and institutions persist in this hypocrisy is a puzzle. That it is supposed to help the stricken bear the pain of their great loss, I know, but the stricken are rarely anything but relieved and when they're not they don't believe it, unless they're morons. "I know how you must be feeling," he said. He didn't. These 'believe me your woe is my woe' characters never do.

"Do you?" How would he react if I told him father had wanted to die. Shocked? Disgusted? Angry? Which, I wondered?

"There isn't much one can say at a time like this." Even if it was only because it was his living must he be so obviously acting.

"The Lord giveth: the Lord taketh away." The moment after I got this out I felt ashamed. A hypocrite and a smart alec has no right to criticise another.

"The divine purpose is strange, passing strange," he intoned, with the solemnity the words and the occasion demanded.

"It is beyond our understanding," Should I have brought a copy of the Bible, I wondered.

"The doctor was with him at the end."

"Everything that could be done, was done." I said, "I know that." I didn't believe this but I hoped I sounded sincere.

"Not even a Rothschild could have been looked after better."

"It must give the stupid a great deal of happiness thinking the wealthy deserve the best because they are wealthy," I thought, but didn't say. It wasn't the best time for a discussion and I could afford to wait until the Greek Calends before I debated that, or anything, with that creep.

"I know that," I said.

"Not even a Rothschild." Enough was enough. I wished to see the body of my father.

"I prefer my Rothschilds dead."

"That's communist talk." Thank goodness, he was genuinely shocked.

"Communists tell the truth sometimes," I said.

"You're not one of those, are you?" Would he refuse to let me see father's body if I was, I wondered.

"I'm not one of nothing," I said. "I want to see my father's body."

"You must be the one who's living with a shiksa."

"That's right. I'm the shiksa lover," I said.

"Is it nice with a shiksa?"

"Just the same as with a schwartze," I told him, and it is, whatever Verwoerd may say.

"That's very clever," he said, grinning slyly.

"I'm a very brilliant man," I told him. "I read the best writers."

"Everybody else cries. You must be very brave."

The poor devil was starved for talk. Father would forgive the slight delay. Time wasn't important to him any more.

"They read different writers," I said. "It makes all the difference."

"He was dead before the matron 'phoned you." So I had guessed wrong and wasted time needlessly and it wasn't important.

"It isn't convenient, the doctor's on the ward."

"They swear an oath to do unto others and the rest," I said.

"He can't object." They swear it but they don't keep it. They're human beings. But there was no point telling that to the porter and shocking him rigid. They used to hang, draw and quarter people who told the truth. Now they only send them to Coventry.

"The matron said she wanted to see you first."

"Let's compromise: I'm a reasonable man: First father, then matron."

"It's more than me job's worth." The whine in his voice was worth a kick up the arse. "I've got me orders."

"So have I and they come from a higher source, mate."

"That's what she said." The whine was more pronounced, "I gotta do what she says."

"All right let's go beard the big She in her den," I said. "I can't get you the sack." "You poor shit," sprang to my tongue but stayed on the moist, warm, tip. They should invent a drug that destroys the pity-creating mechanism and the world would then be a better place, where the murder of 'Yes Sir, No Sir, Three Bags Full Sir' Neoliths would be no crime.

Matron was at her desk signing some letters when I came into the office. I could have sworn that her eyes

were atwinkle with amusement: although it was impossible. She was a matron. Their eyes are always stern and well behaved, lest the code be infringed.

"Mr. Segal?" she asked. I nodded.

"Would you take a seat please." Her voice was the dry, clipped, dedicated one hospital sisters and up always use on duty. "I shan't keep you a moment." Her youthful appearance was a surprise. Matrons always strike me as middle aged, even when they're young. Despite my effort to control my surprise, it must have shown. "People often are!" Her smile was a warm, eye-crinkling one, and that, too, surprised.

I sat down. "Thank you, matron," I said. She had made me feel like the schoolboy being caned — not aware why, but knowing hundreds of reasons.

"I rang for you."

"You told me who you were on the telephone."

"You may see your father in a few minutes."

"I've already been waiting half an hour."

"It isn't convenient at the moment."

"He won't come alive if I see him now," I said rather stupidly. "They only do that when there are no witnesses." This was even more stupid and inconsiderate. She may have been a genuine believer and I couldn't afford to antagonise her.

"There are things to be done before you can see him."

"I know the dead are ugly." This was true; I had seen many dead bodies. "But then so are the living."

"That is rather silly, and it isn't even true."

"You 'phoned and said I must come urgently." She was making me despise myself, and I didn't like that.

"You will see him in a few minutes."

"I want to see him now," I said angrily. "I haven't seen him for a year."

"I know."

What was up ? There was sadness in her eyes as she said this.

"You don't have to worry. I won't cry," I said, meaning it. "I loved my father too much to cry over him."

"I know that" — and it was strange, her voice was kindly, and I couldn't understand, and because I couldn't, I knew I had been wrong and began to like her.

"Saying no is unpleasant," she said, "please believe that."

I believed her, which was stranger still.

"Is it mother ?" I was blunt because I knew she wouldn't lie.

"No," she told me curtly, "it isn't."

"Then why did you phone ? Why ?"

"Because I wish you to see your father before he is buried."

"I've been excommunicated from the fold."

"I know," she said, smiling openly. "The Board of Governors discussed your excommunication at great length."

"That was kind of them."

"They had no option. Your mother insisted that you be barred."

"I was told that the Rabbi really let himself go."

It shouldn't have hurt, since I was an agnostic, but it did.

"I was ordered not to admit you."

"You had your job to do." I hoped she would note the irony in my tone.

"It is a Jewish Old People's Home," she said, as if that justified.

"I wanted to see my father, not become a Rabbi."

"You will in a few minutes."

"I'm still not a Rabbi."

"That's pretty obvious," she said. There was no mistake this time, she was amused.

"I'm glad he's dead," I told her. I knew I could trust her. It was pleasant not to have to act tough any more.

"So is your father."

"I knew you would understand."

"I saw the letter."

"You what !" I spluttered, shocked.

"He gave it to me to read."

"And my answer," I asked accusing, "did you see that, too ?"

"It was self-pitying."

"I'm a self-pitying man."

"You have been hurt badly."

"I'll wait," I said. "I'm sorry I tried to be clever."

"The secretary has some papers for you to sign."

"I'll do whatever you suggest." I trusted her now.

"It may be unpleasant," she said. "There was some objection to your being telephoned."

"The secretary is a very orthodox Jew. He was a cantor until his voice broke."

"You have your faiths mixed," she said coldly. Her tone made it clear I'd gone too far. "Even when it was the Papal Choir it was a poor joke." I started to splutter an apology, but she shushed me, smiling. The human being under that starch had me taped.

"How do I find his office ?" The sooner I signed those forms the sooner I'd see father.

"It's the second door to the right down the corridor, it has 'Secretary' on the door. You can't miss it."

"I was frightened when I came into your office. I'm sorry I've been a clot because of this and some

other things," I told her as I got up to leave.

"It isn't necessary to apologise," she said kindly. "I did understand."

"I want to."

"Then I accept your apology, although it isn't necessary."

"Goodbye, and thank you for your kindness," I said, going into the corridor. I closed the door softly. She was smiling.

The secretary's office was a cubicle cut into the wall that had a torn, frayed rug covering the scrubbed wooden floor.

"A yeshivah boochah with a shiksa," the secretary greeted me with.

"You brought shame on your family."

"Give me the forms to sign." There was no point in a row until I'd seen father, and maybe not then.

"A yeshivah boochah," he mumbled as he handed over a form.

I flattened it out on my knee and signed without reading what I was signing. Unlike the matron, he did not say "Would you take a seat, please." This excommunicant could not expect courtesy from the God-intoxicated man. He that was the pariah standing before him was a ravening beast, deserving nothing.

He snatched the form I had signed.

"Get a death certificate from the registrar," he said, omitting the "please."

"After I've seen father's body."

"First you will go to the registrar."

"First I will see father's body." Time was passing. If I did not see soon, mother would arrive and I would not at all.

I watched the movement of the muscles of his face as he telephoned to the ward. Pity mixed with the

contempt I felt for the man and his narrowness of mind.

He replaced the receiver.

"The porter will take you," he said. "Give the death certificate to the Ward Sister."

I slammed the door hard as I left.

Father was beautiful in death. My remark to the matron had been flippant and wrong. Everything in the quietude of the body, lying so still, so happy at rest, gave to it a dignity that made for beauty. The eyes were sightless, staring afar, seeing beyond. The skin, drying as rigor mortis came, had the sheen given to a wall by a coating of lacquer oil-bound paint. The gibberish the elderly derelicts of the ward whimpered; the spittle they spat from their toothless mouths, and the sour, sweet smell of the newly-dead body of my father, added the further dimension of reality, thereby making it beautiful. The foetid odour of shit pervaded all, thereby adding beauty. A sugar candy mountain beckoned, it lay dead in a bed on the ward, to these shambling, toothless not wanted, and they ignored. These obscene, godlike, beautiful, shitting their fear on to the bed sheets denied through fear. How long, O Lord, before thou wilt suffer us to destroy ourselves? How long?

The body of father lay still — as would be its function till nature, renewing life, would make of it a compost from which new life would come. Seeing this, a gladness welled in my throat, and, overcome with joy, I recited: "Yiskadul, Yiskadush, Shema, Rubbau," the first line of the death dirge of the people chosen by God to suffer at the hands of the Gentiles, called the Kaddish. The quarrels, the money borrowed from those who could ill-afford and never repaid, the not looking for work as we went hungry, the whining

and the cringing to the charitable bodies, would inevitably die as conscious memory now that you were dead. For these are unimportant things, mattering little. The stoop-shouldered man with the sad eyes, sitting on the sofa with the broken springs, telling his son of those who refused to bend the knee and burned roaring their defiance, lives, will remain alive. For this was an important thing, mattering much. "Daas vollen leiben vile ich leib, tuttah."

"The registrar will close in twenty minutes."

I had been too engrossed to pay heed to time. He destroyed the sympathy toward the dead man my wish for death had made, by his presence.

"I'm going in a moment," I told the secretary. I did not look back as I left the ward. That death had been a welcome thing I had already seen.

I ambled along the High Road toward the Registrar's Office, slowly, thinking, remembering. The wide boys who stood in the gutters selling Koh-I-Noors for sixpence to even wider fools, intrigued and delayed a little more. Harsh, shrill, discordant, feminine voices, gossiping, bargaining, tearing a reputation to shreds, amused in a shabby way, and I stopped often to listen, causing still more delay. Everything was so dull, tawdry, ugly. People, buildings, the voices of the people. I wished my father had been an emigree to another land. Outside polyglot Stepney, flamboyantly-alien Soho, and those areas made alive by the joyousness, virility, and natural humanity of the Negroes who live there, London is as attractive as a festering pustule, cauterized the moment before. The delay was my own fault, but I still felt welcome relief when the municipal building that housed the Registrar's Office came into view.

"His age was?" the Registrar asked.

"Sixty-five, on March the third of this year."

"English or foreign born?"

"Lithuanian by birth. British since his naturalisation in nineteen thirteen." I had forgotten the actual date, but it didn't matter as he didn't apparently need to know. Anyway he never asked.

"The wife is still living?"

"My mother is alive."

"Thank you, that is all," he said pleasantly. "I'm sorry I have to ask these questions, but . . ." and he shrugged his shoulders expressively. "If you wait in the ante-room for a couple of minutes an assistant will bring the death certificate."

I had to wait a little longer than a couple of minutes, almost an hour, in fact, but I don't mind waiting when people have been pleasant and tried to make what must be uncomfortable, comfortable.

Mother undoubtedly believed that mourning became her, for the shrill, animal "Oy vey ist meir mein mann ist taut" she was wailing unto the sky must have been heard a mile away. Hearing reminded and sickened. I fought the compulsion to turn and run. Fear of her was the real problem, and cowardice alone answers fear, soothing the guilt and anger the need not to be afraid creates.

The matron stood at the enquiry desk. She was obviously awaiting my return. I felt guilty, knowing that I had wasted time.

"I don't have to tell you that your mother has arrived," she said, smiling. The smile made me feel a little more guilty. "There won't be any bother."

"Thank you." I could have kissed that woman—and kicked myself.

"See that *you* do!" Her smile robbed this of any

malice my thin skin might have given it. She was still smiling as she turned into the corridor.

"Goodbye, and thank you for everything you've done," I called to her back. She turned and waved.

My knees were knocking with fear as I went through the door into the ward.

"Vee iss der shiksa, yock," mother called as she saw me enter. Although she screamed "Ich voll deir zein spaitter" more menacingly, I felt relieved. Matron had not lied. She had managed to bribe, coerce or overawe mother into good behaviour. What came later would come then, and, if I could get away fast enough, I'd be absent.

The nurse remonstrating with mother seemed thoroughly bewildered. "Ulless iss fuh meir ich bin deir veib," mother told her angrily. She was sorting father's things into piles for sale, and the nurse had been shocked. "Ich kann deir fuhkaufen appiss billig." Some of the patients were snickering at the goings on. "Gitta schzoyrah du kanst meir glaben." A few fell for this, and after much fingering of goods and acrimonious argument over prices, one suit, two shirts, three pairs of socks and two sets of wollen undervests and pants were sold. Father had remained silent and unmoving during this; God cannot exist.

"The new cantor comes from a good family," my brother told me. The two jewellery shops had accentuated his nastiness, I was not very surprised to note.

"A Stampede Hill Cohen, no doubt," I said.

Travelling toward the final home of Morris Segal, father, Labour Exchange statistic, and believer in the rights of Man was one thing; taking his snobbish shit was another — very much of another.

"Heiny, boy, I can buy you and that shiksa of yours twice over."

He'd be bearable when he learned that although this was true it didn't mean much.

"Leaf im allon, Isselle," Mother called from her side of the car. I left im allon for the rest of the journey. I was willing to leaf im allon for the rest of my life and send a donation to charity if he allowed me to.

One of these days I'll learn to use my bloody noddle. I should have known that matron's whatever-she-had-done wouldn't last. Now I was boxed in the car with that virago. She was working up to a bloody row. The fidgets, the looks she was giving, and the pursing lips were danger signs if I knew Momma, and, unfortunately, I did too well. "Yock, vee iss your shiksa?" This was going to be very bad, I could tell that from her tone.

"She's all right," I said, wondering what to do.

"Dah curvah macht goot."

"Leave it for now."

"Mein luffly zon 'e maks dirty mit uh curvah."

"Leave it for now, please," I begged. I was afraid. The scar from the glass I had thrown at her could still be seen clearly. I knew what would happen if she kept goading. I knew I'd try to kill her if she didn't stop.

"Don't if you want to live," I shouted at my brother, who had raised a boot to kick. "Don't." He was a potbelly. He'd think twice. The pull of the two jewellery shops and the friendship with the cantor from a good family would be too strong. I was right. He drew his foot back.

"Bustitt!" mother screamed.

"You should know," I said.

"Du bist uh bustitt!"

"Don't tell the driver I'm a bastard," I said, "he isn't interested."

His ear was glued to the window that separated his

cubicle from the passengers' seats, and he was — very much.

"Yock mitt dein zie todt," she screamed. "Deat mitt dein curvah bustitt."

"Shut her up," I told my sister. "Shut her up, please."

"Latter you vill zee. Latter you mitt deiner curvah togadder."

Later would be after the burial. Then it wouldn't matter, nothing would for a little while.

"You killed him." I didn't care what I said any more, I hated her so.

"You kann diss tuh youh muttah zagen ?" She was hurt as I wished her to be hurt — deeply — and I was glad.

"You're a cow. A dirty, money-grabbing cow !"

"Issy, please !" my sister called. "Issy, please !"

"Tell her to leave me alone," I shouted, raging. "I hate her."

"Issy, please stop," my sister begged.

"She killed my father !" I shouted at her. "Your father as well."

"Save it till after" my sister said. "You're both as bad."

"Momzer, Yock, Curvahs ponce !" my mother screamed.

"Shut up ! Leave it till after," my sister told her with a firmness that was a surprise. Mother shut up. The rest of the journey was uneventful. There was some conversation about the insurance policy father had, and Mother yakked about "Mrs. Kamofsky's son and his shiddach with Mrs. Levy's eldest," but the words "Yock" or "Momzer" were not used. None of them used those words.

As the car drew up outside the burial chapel, the

Rabbi came forward. His florid face, the unshaven chin, and the soup stains on his jacket did not inspire.

"Dee zie dee erschter," he told mother.

Behind the coffin we filed slowly into the chapel, with mother in the lead. When three people do not scream like castrated jays to order, the Jewish burial service is noble in its majesty.

"He is not allowed," the Rabbi told my brother.

Tradition demands that a piece of the clothing of a male member of the family be cut or torn. As an excommunicated member of the family, I was not a member of the family as far as the Rabbi was concerned.

"It's a new suit," my brother said with feeling.

"You want to shame your family like your brother, the shaygitz," and "Hymie ich voll butzoon tsi machen uz zoi vee nigh," from the Rabbi and my mother respectively, persuaded. Which had the greater weight I do not know, but I would guess my mother's offer to pay for the repair. The Rabbi snipped into the jacket lapel with a razor blade, and that crisis was past.

The service was rather moving, because my family kept silent throughout. Then, with the Rabbi leading, we marched behind the coffin to the plot dug for father's grave. Tom-cats on the prowl must have been sickened by the howl that went up as the coffin was lowered.

"Goodbye, father," I whispered as the coffin disappeared from sight.

A good son I had never been. Much that I had done was inexcusable, but — and there has been too much in my life that called for but, and I'm sorry—I'd never been as bad ever as that unholy trinity howling their blooming heads off. I'd never shat on him. It wasn't

much, and now that it was too late I wished there had been more. But — again the but — I had never shat on him.

As tradition demanded, my brother forked a couple of clumps of soil into the hole. I was not permitted this, either. The leper, the pariah, the excommunicant, is forbidden this. God would not permit the blasphemy of permitting.

With the ceremony ended, the Rabbi tried to win me back for virtue and Yiddishkeit. I should not have told him to bugger off. It isn't done. But I did feel good saying "bugger off," and I do know why.

Not even an Olympic Games runner giving his all could have moved faster than I toward the entrance. The funeral was over. I had taken part in something I thought had no meaning. A plain cremation without a service is all I want when it's my turn. I knew that father had wanted the same, if his letter hadn't lied. Mother had said "spaitter." A few miles between myself and my family had become politic, for now and forever. "Yock gay tsi dein curvah" are not the most pleasant last words a mother can address to her eldest son, but if I ~~wasn't~~ get from hence to a place a long way thence I'd hear worse, much worse. So I got, at full speed.

The matron rang the next day to ask for a round by round account. She did overdo the "I'm so sorry." Twelve times in a short call is a bit much. But it was only kindness showing, and I thanked her for her sympathy each time.

Although I never met the Rabbi again, I do sometimes think of him. I get very angry and intolerant toward mumbo-jumbo merchants at those times.

Mother, whom I have succeeded in avoiding since,

I think of often. Each time she comes to mind I feel sick. Father, I try not to think of. Sometimes I succeed.

Chapter Twelve

UNLESS you are a sadistic moron, baiting elderly, paranoid Mary Magdalenes doesn't stimulate the gastric juices. Whatever else, the little blonde mouse Frank had nicknamed "Miss Won't Ever" wasn't that kind of obscenity. She looked really sick. When I first noticed her in the crowd, the idea of chatting the piece had crossed my mind, but idly. Unless the loner is an overdressed, overpainted, cheap bint, the odds against making it are at least seven thousand to one. Only the punter who believes in fairies takes that kind of a chance.

Daphne, the poor man's answer to an erection, was among the minority baiting. This slut was a different dish of protein. I never hesitated to say: "Hullo, pushing it out tonight?" with her. There were no moral hangovers with this creature. I started to push toward her. Speed was indicated. Half the yobbos in the Park knew Daphne as I knew Daphne.

"Do you mind!" There was a Yorkshire brogue to the voice that would have attracted me into staying if I'd had the time.

"Sorry," I told it, not looking.

"You don't have to go through me." The voice still attracted, but I didn't think I'd made a conquest from the tone. "Going round is just as easy."

A hand grabbed my coat collar. I turned, ready to blast to hell. To my surprise it was "Miss Won't Ever" who had done this foul deed. She was just what I didn't want to meet just then. Daphne wouldn't be

available for long. I pushed her hand away. She grabbed my elbow. I hadn't even met her, and she grabbed my elbow. I could have broken her neck. She was giggling. I wasn't.

"Was it by accident or design?"

"Of course it was an accident," I told her angrily.

"I don't make a habit of barging into people."

"I thought you did with women."

The catty bitch was asking for a smack in the chops with a remark like that.

"Don't flatter yourself," I told her unpleasantly. "I wouldn't pick you up if you were the last woman on earth."

"You'd be killed in the rush!"

It was time that dish was cut down to size. A delusion like that can be very dangerous, and one has a duty to save people from paranoia.

"I didn't even notice you." This was a lie, because I had. "I was trying to get to a friend." Stretching the truth a bit, you could call Daphne a friend. When it paid, I was a great truth stretcher.

"I didn't think you did." I hadn't fooled her. Her tone showed that.

"I don't have to apologise to you for my actions." The bloody cheeky bitch.

"You just have!"

"I damn well haven't," I told her angrily. "I was just telling you I don't have to."

"You've lost her."

"How the hell?" I choked.

"You kept looking over."

"Goodbye," I said.

"That's not very complimentary," she said, smiling. "We've only just met."

"Maybe it isn't," I said curtly. She made me feel ashamed, and I don't like people who can do that.

"I've often seen you in the Park," she said, ignoring my "Goodbye."

"I'm often here," I told her curtly.

"You're Jewish, aren't you?"

"I'm Jewish, but I'm not a Jew." That I wasn't angry telling this surprised. I had always blown my top when asked this introduction to the "some of my best friends are Jews" gambit before.

"I'm sorry, I hope I haven't hurt you," she said. "It's just that I thought you might be, and I'd like to understand about Jewish people, their history and their strange dietetic laws." She giggled, but not unpleasantly. "I do find them strange, but then," and her giggle became a smile, "they must find ours are, too."

This lass was not for me. The clean, honourable ones never are. I get along best with the hard-faced harridans who take you to the cleaners. You know where you are with those.

"I'm a Quaker," she said.

I now knew why she was a loner and not one of the bints who hang around in crowds looking for a free meal and an easy grind under the trees. "I'd better get quickly," I thought. "You don't take the piss out of a Quaker."

"Don't ever be ashamed of being a Jew."

"Don't worry, I won't. Hitler won't let me," I told her seriously.

This was true. Anti-semites force you to be proud and justify things that can't really be justified or even defended. I was an anti-zionist and I'd never had the courage to come out with an attack on the Jewish

lunacy this was. You can't knock your own when the whole world's knocking them.

"You can't be happy at home."

Now the dish was clairvoyant. If I stayed around she'd have me stripped. I made no effort to leave. There must be more masochism in me than appears on the surface.

"I hate my mother," I told her. Maybe she would be horrified and run away.

"There must be some mothers fit to love," I said, "there are so many of them about."

I can be very stupid on occasions, and this time I beat my record. She should have slapped my face.

"It's just as easy to love as to hate, and it's a nicer feeling," she said. "Love your neighbour comes from the Jew who died on the Cross."

"Please," I said, "let's talk about the weather." That idea was a menace. She was sucking me into the fold.

"He who died on the Cross for us was a Jew."

"I don't bait, but I don't want to know," I told her. She was upsetting me. I had to stop this. "Look, I know all that. I know what was said but I just don't believe."

"What do you believe ? "

"In not banging my head against brick walls."

"You must give witness against the wrong."

"I don't want to be a Quaker," I said. This was a lie I had sometimes.

"You resent me because I make you feel ashamed."

"Maybe," I agreed, "but you should mind your own business."

"You, too, are a child of God."

That kind of argument you can't beat. If you've any sense you run away. I made no effort to leave.

"This is a strange conversation," I said, instead of leaving.

"We have to love each other," she said with a simplicity you couldn't laugh at. I began to see why I hadn't left.

"I don't think I'm Streicher's favourite son."

"We belong to each other."

"In theory, maybe."

"We can make it practice."

"You can." I didn't want to be an entrant in the love-my-brother stakes — I'd had some.

"He died for us."

"I was under the impression I'd killed him." I had heard it so often when I was a kid I'd found myself guilty without calling any evidence.

"It must have hurt when you were a child."

"When I dodged the stones I never noticed."

"I can understand a little more now."

"Understand what?" I asked a little angrily. She certainly had a nerve.

"You sneer at everything, and you get angry so easily."

"I'm angry no" " This was a lie. I was ashamed, but I wasn't angry.

"You can leave," she said. "You don't have to stay."

"They let me vote, as well." It was strange, for she was talking nonsense and I felt drawn to her. She had herself another faggot for the sacrificial pyre if I didn't get away.

"Stop trying to be clever!"

"Go save some other soul!" I told her angrily. Now my dander was up.

"Cleverness won't win you the sympathy you crave."

"Sympathy from a Gentile ? Pull the other leg, it's got bells on."

"Don't be a fool."

"Why trouble with a fool ?" I asked her. "The Park is full of souls calling out for understanding."

"Because I like you," she said. "I've wanted to speak to you for a long time."

"You musn't say things like that to strange men in Hyde Park."

I was genuinely shocked at this, and I think it showed in my tone. "It's asking to be slept with."

"Is that why you're bothering ?"

"Partly," I told her in reply. I prefer being truthful when it's possible. The chances were nil, anyway.

"At least you're honest."

"It's good tactics sometimes," I told her. "I'm always honest at those times, as a matter of principle."

"People are looking at us."

I had noticed that a moment before, but thought, "So what, they're entitled to be nosy."

"They think you're Greta Garbo incognito."

"Stop sneering at people !"

"Would you care for a coffee ?" I don't usually ask this quite so formally, but that dish had me on my knees, panting. A coffee was only fourpence, anyway.

"You'll be wasting your time."

"And money !" I said laughing.

"All right, I will," she said, smiling, "but don't say I didn't warn you !"

"You won't have to slap my face."

"I know I won't," she said, holding out her hand. "I'm Olive Taylor."

"I'm Israel Segal," I said, taking it.

This is how I met the lass who was for me until her

death the quintessence of the good and worthwhile. She is still this, in memory, but it isn't the same. No matter how hard I try to convince myself, it isn't the same. This living being needs a living example to be shaken out of his groove.

The paid hack who lives well, depriving words of meaning with his glorification of the corrupt, depraved, ugly daughters of the wealthy in the gossip columns, is a modern phenomenon the world would be much better without. Because of these, seconded from poncing, lacktalents and their debasing of the word beautiful, I feel uncomfortable writing that Olive was truly beautiful, although she was. I do not propose to forgive these recidivists for this. Any campaign to have them topped, poisoned, stuffed full of horse shit, has my unfailing-until-death support.

The man hating compulsively writes easily, because of his psychosis. The volcanic subconscious erupts a laval stream of invective that grips with its virulence. Unfortunately, when the same man wishes to write of the good, the clean, the sane, the lovable, it isn't quite as easy. For it demands a talent for seeing the divine in the simple that all but the rare writer lacks. It demands a natural prose, free of flourishes and gimmicks, that means rejection of the manuscript submitted. This is — and I'm not kidding myself — an alibi for inevitable failure. Olive lies outside my range as a writer. I lack the talent to show her clearly. The desire exists, but it isn't enough.

Olive Taylor was blonde, five feet five inches in height, small bosomed, who spoke with a pleasing Yorkshire brogue that was unintelligible to the Southerner when she was excited, and was kinder than was good for her. This is, of course, banal and dead anatomical detail that conveys nothing of the being.

She demands a painter who has the genius that can translate, transmute, the eternal caught into divine mystery. Rembrandt painting his Saskia as love felt, known, did this. Bach, weaving immortal melody as his mind soared into the firmament to commune with his God, did this. This writer cannot do this — and he would give ten years of his life to the devil if he could learn how.

I rang Olive the next morning. From this call and the meeting that followed, our relationship grew apace. Within a fortnight we were meeting three times a week. Within a month, I had proposed and been told I was loved but there was her family to consider. A little pressure got Olive to agree that the sooner I met them the better. We travelled to the Yorkshire village where they lived the following Sunday. At the station, I got cold feet, and Olive's, "Don't be silly ! They won't eat you " made me feel a little better, but not much.

Olive's family had never dreamed that she would think of marrying a Jew. Despite this, they made me very welcome. The first visit could have been more propitious for the future. They examined me with such curiosity, I wondered if my fly buttons were undone, and checked five times. It could have been worse. I might have been told not to come again.

After a month of debate, Olive and I went up again. I had kept repeating: " It's our life. Our business," but had not dented the blank wall. I had to get their permission, and that was that.

It took six visits before Olive's dad would discuss the possibility of our marrying. The visits were pleasant enough. They would have been fun — I liked them all — if they hadn't been so tender of my foibles and afraid of hurting my feelings. They were so

careful not to offer me pork, or mention I was Jewish, I felt like jumping on a soap-box and declaring my Jewishness to the world.

Acceptance came when the eldest son, a miner, invited me to the village local for a drink. I had a great deal of sympathy with the miners and their hard lot, so it wasn't difficult to agree with everything he said on that subject. At the end of the evening we were bosom pals.

I have made at least thirty visits to the farmhouse. I can only remember one embarrassing occasion, but it was a king-sized one. Tom Taylor told his daughter Gertrude: "You know, Solly Levi's Jewing the village again." Solly Levi was an elderly Jew who went from village to village selling paste jewellery.

"Father, how can you? Israel's a Jew. How can you be so horrid?"

The old boy grinned back at his daughter. For him, the Jew was Shylock, and if you didn't have a long nose, a usurous instinct and a matted white beard, you were not a Jew. This was his way of telling me that I had passed muster and could marry his daughter. He lived by very definite standards. I had forced him to face up to the reality of these standards. It had been a tough struggle that had taken six weeks of deep thinking before principle overcame prejudice and fear. I admired him a great deal for his bigness. For the man who considers the man in the next village a foreigner and accepts the Jew from London as a husband for his daughter is a fine man. Never again did he mention Solomon Levi. Never again was there any mention of my Jewishness. I was accepted, and for them that was that. A little more of that spirit and maybe we wouldn't deserve to die, slowly, painfully of radioactive sickness.

Mother could not be expected to live up to this high standard, and it was no surprise when she shot round to see Olive's employer. Today, the picture of a short, dumpy, fighting-mad Jewess, spewing red-hot phrases in bad English and good Yiddish at a very gentlemanly cove, who not even his wife had been allowed to see naked, doubles me up. Colin was a decent, clean-minded, liberal type, who didn't mind who somebody else's daughter married. Olive had warned him of the squalls that were coming, and he had the time to polish up the manner. He tried to talk mother out of her opposition, while agreeing that she had the right to feel aggrieved, but failed to sway her into taking defeat in the English manner. "Your son has the right to marry whom he pleases" would have had meaning if said to anyone but my mother. But, as she wasn't interested in anything but stopping her son marrying a shiksa, the Liberal Party missed a convert. "Yuh iss uh ghantlmun duss kann ich zeen, so halp meir pliss." After an hour of argy-bargy, with both only half understanding what the other said, "I'm sorry, I cannot interfere. I really must cut this short," ended the matter as far as Colin was concerned. Mother surprised him and left quietly. She did succeed in selling him a second-hand suit before she left. I think he bought it out of admiration for the effrontery of a woman who could offer to sell him a second-hand suit. I roared with laughter when I heard. Even Olive thought it was funny. We disagreed as to what was funny. She liked custard-pie stuff; I liked the sick, sick, sick variety.

As the day of the marriage drew nearer, Mother whipped herself up to a frenzy of hatefulness. She waited for me each evening outside the office to give me hell; went to the police station to find out if I could

be arrested; chased Olive down the street. If she had caught her, the marriage would have had to be postponed indefinitely — marriage to a corpse is illegal in this country. If you were orthodox, stupid and as prejudiced as a Ku Klux Klanner, you would have agreed that Mother had good reason to feel aggrieved. I had lived with a shiksa and forced her to have me excommunicated, and she still owed the Rabbi for the ceremony. Now, to compound the felony, I was going to marry one. What prostitute would buy second-hand clothes from a woman with such a son? What Lascar would rent a room for a short time with a cheap, sleazy, dockside frump? She had good reason to feel aggrieved.

People who lack scruple can never be beaten. Mother used my betrayal of the Hebrew way, and the shame it brought, to improve herself. She conned a Jewish charity, and almost bankrupted it within nine months. The neighbours, noting the new-found ability to pay cash when she couldn't schnorrer, got envious. Marriage brokers began to be pestered by mothers wanting shiksas for their sons. Today, I can't help feeling it was the synagogue waiting for the payment and the charity body conned almost into bankruptcy that should have objected to my marrying a Gentile.

"Don't be so nervous," Olive said, smiling. "You'll live!"

"I'm not nervous, love, I'm petrified."

"They'll warn us if she's coming."

"She'll fly in on a broomstick" — and I half-believed what I was saying, at that.

"The Registrar's waiting, dear," Olive said, squeezing my hand.

I have to thank a friend for Mother's non-appearance at the ceremony. He told her I was to be married at

another registry office in a different part of the Borough. He beat all existing records for the mile next day when Mother caught up with him. I had offered him the moon to tell this lie, but he had preferred the pound in ready cash.

After six years of marriage, Olive contracted cancer. The courage she showed throughout the years of illness inspired. On the first day I was allowed to visit her, she asked the nurse to put a little powder on her cheeks. Unable to speak, having to be lifted to perform necessary functions, and running a high temperature, she was smiling as I came on the ward.

With blood and sputum pouring from her mouth, and weighing less than six stones, Olive Taylor Segal, often-betrayed wife of Israel Segal, died during the night of May the twenty-second, in the nineteen hundred and sixty-first year of her Lord. As her family wished, her ashes lie buried in a churchyard.

Chapter Thirteen

"MR. SEGAL, your wife is seriously ill," the specialist had told me the day before.

Olive was crying as the white-coated lass half led, half carried her into the darkroom for an X-ray.

"We'll have dinner at Schmidt's," I called.

She turned her head and tried to smile, but the eyes were still afraid, and the tears still ran down her cheeks and the sputum-flecked lips were ugly.

The X-ray showed a cavity in the right lung and a growing infiltration in the left clearly. She was admitted into the hospital immediately. An exhaustive investigation and several sputum tests made it clear that she had been seriously ill and highly infective for some time. In view of this, it was decided to send her to a sanatorium. Some eight weeks, and innumerable rows and appeals later, one willing to accept a seriously-ill, highly-infective person was found.

Despite what I know to the contrary, this sanatorium was not as hellish as Dartmoor. Husbands, wives, relatives, and children over sixteen were allowed to visit between the hours of 2 and 4 p.m. on Wednesdays and Sundays. Also Dartmoor never told those stupid enough to telephone "that the patient had passed a comfortable night." He, or she, enquired after may have been dying, choking in a pool of blood, but they never failed to pass a comfortable night, whether they had or they hadn't.

Wednesday visits were, thanks to the prejudices of the Chief Clerk, Mr. Holmes, out of the question. This

was not an all-embracing rule, and Jewish members of the staff were allowed time off to attend their own funerals.

"You can visit her on Sunday. I would like to say yes, but . . ." When turning down a request from a Jewish member of the staff, Mr. Holmes was full of hot air and "yes, but . . ." "I cannot upset the office routine because your wife is ill." This contribution to amity between a senior and a junior member of the staff would have got him a face full of spit if I wasn't such a spineless amoeba. "To grant you leave would lead to complaints that I favour Jews. You really must learn to face troubles with dignity and courage without whining." When my job may be at stake I have a cheek that turns very easily, but not suggesting that he go and do something I have been told is unnatural and difficult, took all the cowardice I possess.

Life never telegraphs its rabbit-punches. If only the Lord God of Hosts, knowing this, had thought to leave his Saturday night poker game to visit incognito to warn that a fall from grace was impending, I would, in gratitude, have become a Twelfth Day Transvestist the next morning. I would still have sinned—miracles ceased to happen before the first one did — but at least it would have been, since I had been forewarned, less excusable and there would have been no sense of let down.

My travel habits are rigidly conformist. I never hitch-hike journeys of less than a hundred yards, or travel through main streets by submarine, and always use coaches when they're cheaper than trains.

On this Sunday, I arrived at Victoria Coach Station half an hour earlier than I had intended. I often do this sort of thing, and a doctor friend of mine has offered to kill me mercifully if it will help towards a

cure. I am still considering his kind offer. There is a great deal to be said for it, but when all has been said and done, it does seem rather like trying to crack a nut with a cyclotron.

"Is this seat taken?"

I didn't trouble to look up or answer. I was immersed in reading the news piece that read as if the writer had a bent and not a slant on things. Any reader who hasn't guessed that I was reading the *N-w S-----n* hasn't ever read the *N-w S-----n* — or writes for it and only reads the obituaries of his fellow hucksters.

"Is this seat taken?" The voice was louder this time, but still pleasantly pitched.

"Not as far as I know," I told her, still not taking my eyes from the printed page. The words that boy used, and the way he used them would have had a Hairy Ainu, and nobody else, in tucks.

It was not until the coach, starting off in the fifth gear it didn't have, threw me forward into her lap that I took a look. My eyes jumped with glee. The *N-w S-----n* slipped from my hand to the floor, and I made no attempt at recovery. My central nervous system telegraphed "Man, oh, man!" to the gonads, and the message was received with rising clarity. This piece of mouth-watering yum-yum was a Miss Universe with red hair, a peaches-and-cream complexion, nice stems, the slightly too large mouth with full lips I like, and other attractions; two larger-than-is-usual added attractions. Resolutions are for the birds when the Good Lord droppeth the answer to a procurer's prayer into thine lap. I hope the birds didn't get indigestion that afternoon. Inspired by God's goodness to his humble son, I set out to woo the manna from Heaven whose lap I had dropped into. I gave her the full smile that shows I am a Kolynos-twice-a-day man as I said:

“Sorry ! ” Within the next half hour I learned from the lies I told that I was single, a budding writer the better critics said kind things about, and a lying turd.

When I got off the coach at the stop outside the sanatorium gates, I knew with the certainty given by a rising tool that no call to the barricades, no appeal from the Chief Rabbi, could change my determination to be outside the Cumberland Hotel at 9 p.m. and keep the date I had conned her into agreeing to.

Some drastic surgery — a total thorocoplasty — had been Olive’s lot the day before, and not wanting to add to her troubles, I omitted to mention that I intended to step out of line. I did tell her many years after, but then she had been ashes for an hour and I don’t think she heard.

She arrived thirty minutes late. I spent the time reading Anatole France’s *Penguin Island* for the third time. That man really wrote a satire that had punch and pith. She should have been three hours late and given me time to finish it, if she had my interests at heart, or, better still, she shouldn’t have kept the date.

After exchanging names, ages and gassing a bit about who was good, who was bad, in the literary world, we took in a cinema. It was while the hero, standing in the middle of the ranch house, six-guns flaring, recited Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address that the situation became intolerable. The situation was not eased until I got her on the couch in my living-room three hours later.

That night, during the recuperative breaks, I learned that for Miss Paddy Harris life had been a series of tragic, lunatic whirls, compelled by the shame she felt at her bastardy. A rape at the age of six had helped to make her a sex-obsessed adult who did not enjoy sex. The poor devil had a history of mental illness and had

only been let out from a nuttery the week before. The two doctors who had her committed felt that, since she would persist in throwing herself down flights of stairs to end it all, putting her somewhere where the conditions would aggravate this urge was all that could be expected from them, the bastards. That, given how we behave toward the sick and the poor, death was the best thing that could happen to her, was something their medical training had taught them not to see.

The love affairs of this poor idiot, ashamed of being a bastard, really had been a shabby mess. A day after he had sworn eternal fealty to get himself the lay, a Fu Manchu of a Chinese she was enamoured of departed Pekingwards without telephoning to say "goodbye." A year before, a doctor, twice her age, had trundled her well, but with not enough care. He did the abortion himself and gave his medical ethics a kick in the slats they recovered from immediately.

A week later, without bothering to tell me she was coming, Paddy moved into the flat and took over. Within days, bored with my lack of resistance and the easy victory, she began to spread her tentacles. She took a dislike to the landlady for some crazy reason I couldn't fathom, and made it obvious. The house had been split up into four flats, so the other tenants were able to enjoy the view of Paddy, in bra and underpants, jiggling daintily down the stairs for the milk, newspapers and letters. The old duck on the second floor called for the police nearly every day. I think they enjoyed what of Paddy showed, but refused to take any action.

It wasn't only the landlady and the other tenants who would have cheerfully broken her neck. Her carryings on had me frothing at the mouth. Monday she swore she would put some ground glass in my

Risotto if I didn't stop thinking Hemingway was great. Tuesday she would sling in her job and come home by cab and not have enough to pay the fare. Troubling to collect her wages before she left never occurred to her. Wednesday was the day for reading Gide in the lavatory. She saw the deeper meanings if she did it that way, on a Wednesday. Thursday, Mother came to visit, and she got it and I had peace listening. Friday she washed her hair, picked a quarrel and broke plates. Saturday she changed the furniture round, changed it back, and threw small ornaments. Sunday's performance was in a minor key. She knew that this was visiting day and behaved accordingly. She had tried a major key performance out for size on one occasion, but she wanted to stay, so it was only once.

What she demanded as a right in the way of loving up before would have astounded Kraft Ebbing. It had to be done on the carpet; beds, walls, floors, and the Heavyside Layer were out. Even when it was early morning and cold enough to freeze the balls off a Polar Bear, the windows had to be open and the curtains undrawn before she would open her legs. The gramophone had to be playing a schmaltzy recording of *Tales from the Vienna Woods*. I had to be accoutred in shoes and socks to cover my nakedness or there was a bloody explosion and her fingernails — they were long and pointed — tore at my face. I was not allowed to manually stimulate or touch her. She went off into paroxysms that were lunatic and frightening when I forgot this and did. But, despite the phobia, she did like to be touched, smacked, kicked, on the bottom medium hard. Here she came unstuck, and tears, hysterics, and cursing didn't help to alter my particular phobia. I had a coward's horror of inflicting pain, because I had a coward's horror of suffering pain. Many

of the manoeuvres she asked for would have taxed a prize-winning gymnast beyond the full, and here, too, she was often left unsatisfied. Here it wasn't principle, but a body willing and a skill lacking. After a few sessions, I found that getting a rise, let alone an orgasm, demanded too much of my will and muscles and cut down on the number of performances weekly by half. I had always believed that I was a crude specimen who could orgasm on a slag heap and enjoy the view. Learning that I wasn't did something to my pride I could use more of.

With the passing of the days and the lengthening of the nights it became easier to accept that the blowing up, blowing down, and her obvious schizophrenia could be lived with. This utopian existence, modern mode, blew up into bits of undiluted hell the day she learned that she was pregnant. That night I suffered two kicks in the slats and some scratches before I got a bottle of sleeping tablets away from her. When I flushed them down the sink I suffered three kicks, but they were not in the slats, and some more scratches. As there are a number of reasons, all important, why I should have been benevolent watcher during this suicide attempt I do now regret that I behaved in the stereotyped moralist manner

Mother was, certain to number abortionists among her friends and I couldn't afford pride or decency at a time like this. The next morning, after getting Paddy to promise no suicide while I was out, on her Cub's honour, I went to East London. When something dirty is needed blood is always thicker than water and mother would't let me down if there was something in it for her. On the bus I remembered the story of the doctor who had curettaged and slung into a bucket the

result of a moment's forgetfulness on his part. I did not get off the bus.

"Zee vace nicht tsi usen appiss."

"One mistake everybody is allowed." Needing her help, I said this apologetically.

"Ich haben uh zeen vus iss uh schwantz."

"Let's discuss the cost," I said. That this would get her interest I knew.

"Wiffel gelt wilt tsi bartsuln."

The final price fixed was six guineas, and mother then gave me the address of one of these creatures. The next day she drew a guinea as commission for trade brought from the creature. One day I will write a definitive biography of her and entitle it "I admire Mama and the obscene."

The fee paid was earned. The abortionist was an honest woman who feared God, subscribed to charity, read the gossip columns religiously, adored her children, was a faithful wife, and deserved the joy that knowing that she answered the call for help for the profit it gave to her. The syringe was inserted and the body of Paddy shuddered as the cold metal of the needle entered deeply. Twelve hours later, the body contorting in unnatural rhythms as the womb contracted to expel, the real agony began, and Paddy screamed and tore at her flesh to assuage.

"She'll die if you don't come. She'll die," I screamed into the telephone.

"There's nothing I can do," the doctor said. "You shouldn't have left her."

"The landlady is with her. She offered. One can be wrong about people."

"There's nothing I can do," he repeated. "I can't afford to involve myself."

"She'll die if you don't come," I screamed, "she'll die, please."

"She isn't on my panel. Try another doctor."

"I'll pay. She'll die. Come, please. She'll die."

"I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Thank you," I said. "I don't want her to die."

The doctor arrived an hour later and did nothing. The ambulance followed him within a few minutes and the nurse who came into the room with the stretcher bearers did nothing. One of the stretcher bearers wiped her clean with some cotton wool and soothed her. The doctor sent in a bill for five pounds the next day.

While being removed from the ambulance Paddy screamed "God, !" with each convulsive booms-a-daisy of her body, and a viscous mass slowly slid down her thighs onto the pavement. As there was no direct evidence and no confession of guilt the Ward Sister's "I suppose it was an accident on purpose," was unjust and resented. Having decided to trust to experience, the doctor marked admission card "induced abortion" and notified the police. They called the next day but were unable to threaten, wheedle or cozen an admission of guilt and left dissatisfied — arrest figures for the day unimproved.

I behaved impeccably during her hospital stay. I never failed to bring grapes and flowers on my occasional visits. The conversations we had at these times were acrimonious and much enjoyed by the other patients. A holiday from me had shown this schizophrenic that I was a barrel full of piss and wind. Unfortunately the return to sanity was only temporary. A month later she wrote suggesting that we lovey-dovey up again. I found myself unable to write back "yes" and didn't trouble to reply for that reason.

A great loss can be born. It is only the minor losses

that produce the psychosomatic symptoms that destroy sanity. The desire to trundle feminine all and sundry remained, but the capacity to give expression to that desire in orgasm was now lacking. As the knowledge that I was now no longer a social being spread, women I thought my friends crossed the street to avoid saying "hullo."

This dereliction of social function was short lived, a charming American dish of psychiatric fruit cake revitalised and I again became the man with the mostest up the spout.

We met when she rudely interrupted a Hyde Park discussion I was monopolising. I spent some time with her at the gates convincing, despite the evidence to the contrary she had been listening to, that I was the intelligent, strong, silent type who appealed. After her admission that she had misjudged in seeing me as a loud-mouthed cretin, and that I was a worthy citizen of the mother of democracy, the basis of a friendship I didn't want was laid. Friendship between a man and a woman is possible, but the man has to be obviously homosexual.

Five hours later our relationship reached the only climax that justifies a relationship between members of the opposite sexes, as I penetrated through a hurdle of matted pubic hair into the holy of holies. The venue was Epping Forest and although the grass was damp our movements were uninhibited.

Even though she insisted on going dutch in everything, a trait worthy of praise, and would even concede that America may have had a little still left to learn from the Australian Aboriginal, I found being with her as pleasant as the death of a thousand cuts. For her all was grist for a Freudian motivated psychiatric mill. The act of defecation was not, in her

book, a natural act that one took for granted, but the expression of aggression that must be dissected, droplet by droplet, with a plethora of seven syllable words. I grew to know more about the Ids, Ergs, and Libidoes than any man who wishes to keep away from nutteries needs to know.

Jean, undecided whether to divorce her husband, had come to England for a short holiday hoping he would die while she was away and save her the loss of some community property. She claimed that he was a boor, who never went to parties, who would never become the president of General Motors.

"He just won't talk."

"Then divorce him," I suggested, trying to do the bloke a favour.

"But . . ." and then I got Freud undiluted with a stupidity worthy of a better cause. I am a keen believer in "till death do us part" for others, but the endless decision so that she could talk about it some more wore me down to the stitches in my scrotum.

Our last night was spent in a dingy hotel off the Euston Road. I found it difficult to give her a finale she would remember. A two-hour monologue on the incidence of masturbation among Los Angeles youth of high school age does inhibit. Relieved that the adventure was over, and my anti-Americanism had received a fillip, I said goodbye at London Airport with the melancholy good manners demanded of one on these occasions. The following day I wrote that our friendship had been memorable, which was true, and was something I would never forget, which was very, very untrue. Recovery was slow, and whenever I remembered "let's analyse what it means" I had a relapse, but within a fortnight I was back on solids.

Chapter Fourteen

THE DAY I decided not to read Tynan on Tynan, and Gilliatt on Gilliatt, the desire to attempt suicide a second time went. I cannot forgive them for this. The first effort was such a fiasco I needed a success to restore my confidence.

The first effort began with this I, fully compos mentis, ingesting a number — unfortunately not a large enough number — of phenobarbitone tablets. It ended with this I, now very sick, being made sicker by having a stomach pump forced down his gullet. A neighbour calling to borrow a book had found me, groaning, on the kitchen floor and rung the local hospital. It was a long time before I forgave him his well-intentioned unkindness.

"How does it feel to still be alive?" the doctor doing the ward round asked.

"Headachy."

"You should be feeling a little more chipper now."

"I haven't been sick in the last five minutes."

"A wash out by stomach pump can be nasty."

"The one you did on me certainly was."

"Has the Sister told you where you're to be sent?"

"She mentioned something about a nuttery but didn't give it a name."

"Arrangements are being made to have you admitted to a Neurosis Unit."

"Shouldn't 'admitted' be 'committed', in the interests of truth?"

"It shouldn't!" the doctor told me curtly, obviously annoyed that I thought him a liar.

"Sorry," I told him apologetically. "I thought that was what was always done."

"It's not mandatory."

"Do I go by ambulance or chauffeur-driven Rolls?"

"You do work hard at it."

"It's second nature to me now."

"You do want me to dislike you."

"It's not a be all and end all."

"Isn't there anyone you like?"

"I could like Einstein, if we never met." I was sick of being asked that one and this was my stock answer.

"You'll be a different man after some psychiatric treatment."

"Maybe." This was another I couldn't be bothered with and when I worked out a stock answer I'd use it whenever it was asked.

"You will."

I was pleased he felt so confident. I like people to be sure about something. I like learning they've been wrong even more.

"I wish I was mad." I said with feeling. "It would be easier then."

"You need a Neurosis Unit, not an asylum."

"I thought they had to be called mental hospitals these days?"

"They do." He smiled saying this, and I was pleased. I really was frightened that I would be sent to a nuttery.

"How long before I'm shifted to a Neurosis Unit?" The doctor grinned at my emphasis of the last two words.

"As soon as we can get you into one."

"I'm all ready. I brought my razor."

"It sometimes takes a little time."

"The *Times* has a crossword puzzle every day."

"Would you like to go home this afternoon?"

"If you like," I said sincerely. "I don't care much either way."

"You can leave after lunch."

"I won't."

"I know that," he said smiling. "You won't be able to because I trusted you."

"Thank you."

"Goodbye and good luck to you," he said, shaking hands and going on to the next bed.

"You can stomach pump me any time," I called to his back, and he turned round so that I could see his grin.

The "a bed is now available" letter arrived eight days later by the first post. It said little more than this, but then these half-true, half-lie missives never do. The hospital authorities want you to report to the hospital after receipt — not emigrate to Tierra del Fuego.

The days I had spent waiting for the letter of admission to the nuttery had been happy ones. I had been able to complete a couple of the *Times* crossword puzzles, eat several good meals, masturbate twice, and read some Proust, without a thought as to the future. It was enough for me to know that something was to be done, and that I would be changed by this. Any change was preferable to the mental status quo that was my lot. I decided to be placid and enjoy simple things, and I did.

Greta Garbo giving John Gilbert those "Aye tink aye go ome mit you" looks was my choice for the last afternoon, and it was a wise choice. Her fine performance struck a chord, and I spent hours after I had left the cinema wondering whether she was

straight or sappho. It also struck me that a piece of crumpet in the bed is worth a dozen Gretas on the screen and it could have been spent more pleasurably still.

The next morning, I caught a bus in the High Street that branched off within walking distance of Slapsbury Mental Hospital -- my new home for a while. I was determined to arrive ready in mind, prepared in spirit and, as always, early. Not emigrating to Tierra del Fuego and kidding myself after reading that letter is only one of the many mistakes in a lifetime dedicated to bloomers, but it was the biggest one.

That damned nut sanctuary I had been booked into looked so much a mediaeval Lazar House, I guessed -- rightly, I learned later -- that it had been built when John Brown's favourite pin-up was on the throne. My mind reared, stricken, as the eyes registered the monstrosity and beseeched body to turn and run. But reason -- soft, compelling -- whispered to the mind, ignore, prison awaits without those gates if body does not report. And reason won, as it should always, and I passed through the gates to the hell that lay beyond trembling, afraid.

The flowers lining both sides of the avenue that led to the main reception building were erupting into bloom in a flame of colours, while the zombie patients, so obviously living dead, shambled by the beauty erupting before their eyes, unseeing. They lived, in their minds, in the primeval past of the protoplasmic blob that clings to life viciously, seeing nothing, knowing nothing but that urge. As I walked by them toward the main reception block, I prayed that they would soon find release from their nothingness in death.

The main reception block was the squalid, drear workhouse Victorian philanthropists built for the sick and senile of the lower orders. As I handed the letter to a porter — whose attitude changed immediately he recognised it — I wondered why these good people built fine homes for themselves and ugly institutions for the objects of their charity, if they were good people. "Follow me," the porter said, rather more brusquely than he needed, and I followed him into a rather shabby office. Here the reception clerk, a born spinster with bad legs, a puny bust, and enormous hips, motioned me to a chair. The signing of the necessary forms, the making a specimen of urine, the blood sample for the Wasserman, and the weigh-in did not take long, and the lass did try not to hurt as she pushed the hypodermic syringe home, bless her puny mammaries. I hate the cold feeling of the needle on the skin, the jab that makes you twitch, and the smile I have seen — too often — on the face of a nurse as she gave an injection.

"He's a right cow son." With the preliminaries over, the details typed out on the admission card, the porter taking me to the Neurosis Unit was trying to give me the jitters — and succeeding.

"Your wife must love you!" I was tired of him and didn't care whether letting him know it would hurt his feelings — if he had feelings.

"Is you taking the piss?"

"Don't be silly," I told him, "I'd be too scared."

"That's all right then."

"Do they let you smoke?" I asked to change the subject.

"You can do what you bleeding well like if you ain't a nuisance."

"I won't be," I said sincerely.

"Hang on 'ere," he said, stopping outside an office. "I'll see if he can see yer."

"Sit down," the doctor said.

I sat down and looked round the office while he read the letter I had brought. It was pleasant, and I was pleased to see that the *Times* on his desk showed the crossword puzzle half done. As I have the layman's awe for the disciples of Galen, learning that he was a stupid clot was not so pleasing. His questions were of the "Have you stopped loving it up with your mother, brother and sister?" variety one never expects even the psychiatrist to put. I did not trouble to answer them and just blushed at the most stinking. Having to do a piss in a lavatory minus a door while he stood watching was less pleasing still. I have also the average man's inhibitions about exhibitionism. His "You'll find things a little strange for a while," seemed a fair guess at how I would find things if "strange" was changed to "bloody awful" and "for a while" was amended slightly to "the duration of your stay." He had not made an examination, and I had only answered one of the questions he put — the one that asked my name. As I left the Presence, curtly dismissed, I prayed that not all the doctors in that mental hospital were quite that stupid. The Lord did not heed my prayer and change them.

The Neurosis Unit was as squalid and drear as the main building, though of more recent architectural vintage — but it only registered superficially. I was still recovering, and if it had been a tent it wouldn't have mattered or made any impression on my artistic sensibilities. That I should have felt sad as the porter, handing me over to a male nurse, said "Goodbye" has worried me since, but it never occurred to me to do

so and I didn't. I did breathe a sigh of relief, but that isn't the same.

The admission, the allocation of a bed, and the grand tour was rushed through. By the ordure heap of Arden House I could have sat me down and wept. The stink of decaying vegetables and rotting meat effluviating from the lidless dustbins stung the nostrils. The chipped Army-type bed, with its grey blankets bespecked with dried spittle, nauseated. The trodden-in food droppings on the floor, polished over, made an abstract a child without a mind might have painted. If the authorities had wished to teach that suicide does pay, they couldn't have sent me to a better place.

This unit was noted for its semi-successful use of that variant of the Catholic Confessional misnamed Group Therapy. This form of lunacy took sick men and women of varying ages, temperaments and stupidities, and had them confess publicly to various peccadilloes that were impossible. To ensure that the maximum harm was done, our unit insisted that a psychiatrist, who never asked a question, and a male nurse, too busy scratching his nose to be interested, be present at all sessions. All information obtained during these public exhibitions was rarely of value to the psychiatrist, but it did help the nastier patients to make life a hell for the others. As a therapy form it was preferable to a pre-frontal leucotomy, where the results are permanent, but the margin is exceedingly small.

The first ten minutes of our sessions were spent saying "Good morning" to people with whom one had shared a breakfast table. Living always in fear, and therefore considerate of others, the mentally unbalanced are ever effusively polite: "Good mornings" over, we got down to the waste of time the next hour was. As with the Friends' meeting, those feeling the

need to give witness gave witness, while the rest chattered about the weather. The subjects discussed would have horrified a Quaker, but I am discussing the method used and that would have been familiar.

The register of attendance was kept, the football sweepstake and tea money was collected, and the discussion was always begun by a leader, chosen from among us by secret ballot. I shouldn't have liked that job, and, given my unpopularity with the staff, I never would have been given that job, secret ballot or not. The staff had the right to veto any choice made and used it often.

The current Toad of Toad Hall had been pushed down our throats, and it had left a sick feeling. This moral sauroid was admittedly charming in manner, personable in dress, and a real staff nark. It is the last that explains his choice. In him, nature and nurture had combined to prove that the cro-magnon with a modern veneer is the man best likely to succeed in this post-Hiroshima, Nagasaki, jet-engined age. As corrupt toadies are usually efficient, the group ran on a fairly even keel. The occasional explosions, the frequent attempts at suicide, and the almost daily attempts to maim this hyena in skunk's clothing, were just the reactions of unhappy people to intolerable provocation and were ignored by the staff.

The leader came from an Army family and had himself served in the ranks in this country and India. In common with most men who have been regular soldiers, butlers or valets, he sickened with his fawning adulation of the worthless, effete, ridin'-huntin'-shootin' unspeakables. It followed naturally from this that he would treat all poorer than himself with a dowager duchess hauteur worth a trip into a gas chamber. Untroubled by ideals, this common denominator of

modern man would have served equally loyally any Communist or Fascist regime. It was in his morality that he was most worthwhile as a symbol of those values the Establishment insists are worthwhile, for others. For, for him, the sanctity of marriage was the sanctity of marriage. Maintaining the sanctity of the home was to maintain the sanctity of the home. The duties one had were the duties one had, and to deny those duties was to deny those duties, and shatter those duties. Decency was decency, and indecency was indecency, and everyone who was someone knew that to be decent meant that one was decent and eligible for the Royal Enclosure at Ascot. He knew all this with a rightness that passeth understanding, having been taught all this from childhood by those corrupts whose survival depends on others accepting this. I hate the men who trained this puppet to dance to their tune, and so destroyed whatever dregs of humanity this creature may have had with a psychotic intensity.

Whenever the leader obliged us by being sick and absent, his friend pinchitted in the post. Surprisingly, he was neither personable or bearable. I write "surprisingly", since he was the personnel manager of a large concern and was apparently well liked by his employer and detested by the workers. William ("don't call me Bill") was an understrapper de luxe model, and obnoxious on other counts as well. The personality problems that had made him group therapy fodder needed euthenasia, not psychiatry, if he was to be cured. With his dominating fear that the rude, crude and virile menaced his superiority, his hatred for his wife, and all things worthwhile, followed naturally. As did his urbanity towards his rather backward son in public and his sadism toward the poor little devil in

private Had Moses known William, there would have been nine, not ten, Commandments.

Next to myself, Claude, a drunken, mis-shapen, eczema-pitted deviationist, who expressed his urge for understanding by touching up young girls in cinemas, was the most disliked member of the group. Drunk, I found him entertaining, devoid of any sense of shame or guilt, and worthless. Sober, I found him dull, a mass of guilt complexes all phoney, and worthless. There were times when he did attempt to restrain his urge to interfere with young children, but immediately he was discharged on parole from a mental hospital the cinema episodes restarted. I think that it is wrong to expect people to behave in a manner unnatural to them, and, pending a cure, he should have been shot dead.

The others were just total nondescript misfits, and were just carbon copies of so many voters. Soul-destroying jobs, nagging, sluttish wives, a lack of interest in them when young, and the cash nexus society in which they were born and grew up, gave them a sense of grievance that, not understood, not sublimated in murder, drove into the sanctuary of a loony bin. Lemmings driven by people who understood them too well and used that understanding to debase them further with washing machines, television sets and the worship of country, they will drop atom bombs, not drop atom bombs, as ordered by their betters. They left as they had come, in units of a louse pack, ready to follow the obscene, having been told it was the just. What possible good can psycho-analysis, group therapy and the other techniques of the Freudian weissenheimers do for these poor creatures that will not be undone by society immediately? A pathetic believer in the wrong values, whose ambitions are made for

him, who apes wealthier social misfits as an eternal verity, and votes believing his vote matters, needs dragging by the scruff of the neck into a new social order, not psychiatry.

Of the ladies, God bless 'em, time out for port and cigars, one can only say if they were young you felt like "Into the bed, duchess"; if they were old, you didn't.

It was after I had served three months of group therapy servitude that the psychiatrist judged I was ready to be returned to the lunatic world outside. This is the only decision he made in the months I knew him that I find myself unable to fault in any particular. That I left hating with greater intensity the things I had hated greatly before my admission was inevitable and good, giving me meaning. I still am proud to be a hater of the patriotic, willing to kill and die for the worthless man.

The attempted suicide had expiated his sin in suffering. Now he was ready to be returned to the society that had made him sin, because he was man, ashamed of what the leaders had done in his name. The list is long and irrevocable and is headed by Dachau, and closely followed by Hiroshima. The Nazi leaders who had ordered genocide were tried and justly condemned. The American President who ordered that the bomb be dropped on August 6th, has not been tried, not been condemned, by the world. The attempted suicide was still guilty but, because he had attempted, he could begin to rise off all fours. One day he would attempt again and succeed, and there would be no more guilt, no more shame, because he would be dead.

Chapter Fifteen

A BLACK PRINCE from a far-off land wedded a fair English rose — and all hell broke loose ! Dr. Malan blew his top: unfortunately, not fatally. Mr. Patrick Gordon Walker discovered a capacity for expediency at the expense of principle that must have surprised that upright man. The *Daily Worker* leader writer almost burst a gasket with synthetic indignation. Seretse Khama continued to behave with the natural dignity of the negro.

Our reputation as an eccentric people often stirred to anger by the necessity to feel stirred to anger, often is not wholly undeserved. Some Labour Party members did feel that depriving a man of the natural right to choose the mate he wished to choose was not why they had worked for the return of a Labour Government. The Press fanned this feeling with a campaign that pulled no punches that would help the Tories, that roused the country. A few Labour M.P.s, keenly aware that the Tories must not capture the campaign and their seats, bestirred themselves just enough to get their speeches reported. Within days, Seretse Khama was being asked his opinions on a variety of topics that didn't interest him. It seemed that, for once, a wrong would be righted before the wronged man was dead: only it wasn't. As Dr. Malan had not insisted that the Colonial Secretary of Great Britain and Northern Ireland must be a member of the Broederbond, the Government denied that anything had happened, and got away with it.

Even our local Labour Party had been stirred to any action that would take the heat off them. A member had even threatened to resign if not given a perk to quieten his conscience. To ease the situation, the Executive decided to hold a public meeting and allow questions, but no discussion. The speaker chosen was acceptable to the majority and accepted by the minority as the best possible man when it was made clear that this character was what they were going to get.

As advertised by poster and leaflet, the meeting began at 8 p.m. I ceased to take an active, listening interest in the proceedings at 8.20 p.m. The speaker had objected to being asked "why the bloody hell a person could not marry whom he wished, if the lady was willing" and the stewards had given force to his objection — forcibly. I shall always be grateful to the speaker and the stewards for the lesson they gave me in democratic procedure.

I was busy bugging and blinding and dusting specks of floor dust from the seat of my pants, when a Negro slapped me on the back. I liked the broad smile that came with the slap and smiled back. "Let's have a drink," he said. "O.K., if it's on me," I replied. The boozing session ended with the pair of us tipsy and broke two hours later. At 4 a.m., when we parted, we had plighted a friendship troth that was a little more than alcoholically sincere.

Barry became my friend and literary mentor. A damn good friend, and a damned poor literary mentor. He had taken his first lungful of air in a shantytown kennel. At thirteen, an Anglican clergyman, a rare man, had taught him to read and write. His first poems had drawn the attention of some wealthy, culture-conscious vultures and they had invited him into their homes — by the servants' entrance. As his fame grew,

a wealthy South African homosexual offered to employ him as his number one bed boy. Barry wanted to be a writer, but not that much if it could be done another way. A chance meeting in a shebeen bar with a merchant seaman showed that it could — and it was. He stowed away on a ship bound for Liverpool.

He had only been in England a couple of months when the Communists captured him. A docker who bought him the occasional meal took him along to a meeting of the local group. As most members of the Communist Party are sincere socialists who have despaired of the Labour Party, he was made welcome without any “some of my best friends are Negroes” hypocrisy. Knocked off balance into wide-eyed adulation by this treatment, he became a card-carrying member three months later. Resenting being told what to write, how to write, and why he wrote, disenchantment came and he resigned a year later. Lacking Mr. Koestler’s manic hysteria, he did not write a bad book on his nine months as a member.

During the war years, people were too busy, and too afraid, to spare the stupidity discrimination demands, and so they were for him happy years. The post-war years were not. They brought him into contact with the English landlady, and from this experience there is no recovery. To be kept waiting on a doorstep while a slutish crone searches her near-vacuous mind for the insult she can get away with is an indecency suffered that not even a brain-washing can erase from the subconscious.

I had been living in a two-bedroomed monstrosity on a modern housing estate for almost eleven months the evening I met Barry. As he had only been one of us for three days, his eyes were still clear, and he could control his hands.

These jerry-built ant-hives were a final, incontrovertible proof that when it is profitable to lack them, builders find it easy to lack taste and a social conscience. As bad workmanship had been the ideal aimed at, it would be unfair to write that they did not vary in the way the doors were out of true. The kitchens, box-like rooms, and cheaply-gilded fitments, were perfect examples of the claustrophobia-inducing and neurosis-creating. The estate had been built to capitalise on a genuine social need, worsened by the Blitz, and, given our cash nexus way of life, I presume they were an answer, even though they were bloody awful dumps.

Whenever it stops the products of another's loins profiting from an avarice you are too dead to enjoy, monogamy can be said to have done that which it was instituted among us to do. But when its exponents carry their fanaticism to extremes and want it and its sideline, marital fidelity, practiced as well as preached, I check with the local gunsmith. A Wesson fitted with a silencer is, I am told, a most efficient weapon. On second thoughts, since it demands a plentiful supply of prostitutes, enthusiastic amateurs and wives with a husband morality, and the demand for these far exceeds the supply, I can safely put my money on polygamy to nose ahead in the free world. Further, since it also demands that the female shall never grow old or ugly — and most women are born ugly and become uglier with age — I think that giving any takers a hundred to one against it lasting is a safe bet. The proof of this nonsense I've dreamed up is in its rare exceptions. Barry and I had wives who became more beautiful with the years.

Daphne was a petite, high cheek-boned, full-lipped, pleasantly small bosomed, worthy wife and mother-of-three brunette spitfires. Fortunately she kept her

fingernails short. I find it impossible to hold her finishing-school snobbery and her liking for the gossip columns against her, although I have tried. People are not angels, and she is certainly much closer to those much-maligned creatures than I.

Her worthiness of character showed pretty clearly when one learned what she had gone through to marry Barry. Her friends, using that holier-than-thou tone people use when they wish to be helpful and are being impertinent, told her that Barry was a black man, and girls in her position — her father was a diplomat — didn't marry black men. Fools never leave well alone, and next came the one about the position of the children of a mixed marriage. This is, of course, a problem — but it wouldn't be if people accepted miscegenation as a step forward, not backwards, in eugenics, as those who should know do. From the day of their marriage, her life was Barry. And when the children came, it was both. It was beautiful to watch the way her eyes lit up as Barry came into the room, and the half-shy, half this-is-mine-for-always way her hands stole out to caress his cheek. I wish the friends and well-wishers could have been present on those occasions — the moronic clots.

That the children of mixed marriages are born with a cloven hoof on their forehead is a canard, put about by interested parties. I knew Barry's three intimately, and examined them on several occasions with him to check my findings, and I was unable to find any sign that a cloven hoof was present, or had been present. They were, as far as I could tell, perfectly-formed little imps whom I adored.

The eldest was an olive-skinned, dark-haired, black-eyed bag of mischief and imperious dignity that one bar of chocolate never dented but two cracked. Next

to her in the line of succession came a healthy stripling of seven, with a coffee-coloured skin, negroid fuzzy hair, the glorious white teeth of the negro, and an ability to cry at will that he used wisely to almost bankrupt Olive. I once threatened — I have a lunatic sense of humour — to include him in my Income Tax return for that year as a necessary expense. That night, I only got my supper after apologising non-stop for fifteen minutes and promising — again non-stop, for another fifteen — that I would never crack a silly joke like that again.

Olive, tubercular, unable to have children and unable to adopt them because of the nature of her illness, adored the little con man and he was a worthy object for her adoration. The baby was as black as the ace of spades and as cuddly as a teddy bear. She let you cuddle when she was so minded but made you aware that it was a privilege that had to be earned and the price was high in willingness to play and affection. She was my favourite and I never threatened to include her on my income tax return as a necessary expense. This, of course, must read like a slop born of having no children of my own to father and a desire, conscious and unconscious, to see the children of mixed marriages through velvet-covered spectacles, and this may well be true or rather it may be two facets of a many-sided truth but the reality is my love for them, and inner motivations for that love are comparatively unimportant in the face of that reality. Abbysinnian, Dutch, Jewish, Bantu, English and possibly some other racial strains had gone into the making of those three and the amalgam had come out perfect. Put that in your pipe, Dr. Verwoed, and I hope it chokes you.

It is the memories of the nights spent in Barry's home or mine, nattering away between sips of Captain

Morgan and water that are pleasantest in recall. The demon three would be upstairs asleep, or pretending to be asleep, when his home was the venue. Daphne would be sitting straightbacked, prim, a 'don't try any nonsense you two' expression on her face, darning some socks with an ear cocked for the slightest sound from upstairs, while we rearranged the world to our mutual liking.

All the nights ran on this even tenor and they were all good. The one that sticks out from the others only does so because I sometimes rush in where a sensible man would retreat, and lose a friend or respect for a friend.

"Then what does make a lending library classic?" I asked Barry on this night.

"Tits, arse, a lashing of sadism and unreal romantic situations," he replied.

Unfortunately he burped during this exposition of what makes a book that brings in the royalty shekels. Maria affronted said, "Say pardon me," so primly I roared with laughter, and somehow when my hysteria was over the subject was Maria's primness. I had noted a touch of self hatred when Barry had given me the formula for a successful novel and it intrigued. I decided to re-read all his books carefully and then re-raise the subject. Partly because I was jealous of his talent, and partly because I was enamoured of Hemingway and the tough school then and didn't much like his work, I had only skipped and skimmed through them.

Barry's first book was an amateur, shapeless, symphony in a prose that had the lilt of real old-time jazz, which brought the tang and feel of a multi-racial city vividly to mind. It had the acrid flavour of sweat and I hope that I learn to write as well one day. I remem-

ber what some of the café au lait, stiletto in the back boys, had said of this book and wondered, for the millionth time, why they didn't go and stuff themselves with a red hot poker. The second was a piece of crap that should have been serialised in *Woman*, it was that bad. The others didn't even get off the ground and shouldn't have been serialised in *Woman*, they were such shitty slush. The mystery was solved, only it hadn't been a mystery, it had stood out a mile. I hadn't seen because I didn't want to see. Barry was a negro so I had endowed him with the virtues of Christ and the genius of Shakespeare and he was just a one-book man and then the sell-out. The cash nexus and the need for recognition had dehydrated the talent. The gravy train aesthetes, bite, scratch, and kick to get on, had got itself one more first-class passenger. The nigger had become an Uncle Tom negro and the hoi-polloi invited him into their homes and there would be no second book, just lots of books to a formula, a sell-out formula. I never discussed books with Barry ever again and though he didn't say, I think he knew why.

You meet a bloke and because you like him you find excuses but it's never the same. He had a million alibis. They come by the pound in every novel you read. "Darling I do love you but Cynthia has an Aston Martin and she is 70 years older." "I want a room at the top. Give me a room at the top and a directorship and I'll marry Minnie the Moocher." "That's what is wrong with us all, we don't care, we just don't care." "Henry flicked the match on his fingernail and stared masterfully at Hermione. She felt something escaping from within her. 'By God,' she thought, 'I've forgotten to use Tampax'." Yes, he did have a million alibis but it would have been nice if he had written a second

tonal symphony in that poetic prose that had the beat of old-time jazz, and satisfying too.

I once drew up a plan for a novel that would incorporate all those elements in Barry's work that had brought him success. And here it is.

Take an honest, striving, sympathetic, intelligent, coloured Adonis. Have him fall in love with, or fallen in love with, seducing or being seduced by, a pretty, virtuous Afrikaner wench who takes a bath in national costume. Then include a chapter showing how hard it is to get a long skirt over your ears if both hands are occupied playing a Glockenspiel. Follow this for dramatic effect with a chapter that explains in seventeen-syllable words what effect discovering that one is pregnant has on a naive wench who believes that all conception is immaculate. Jump the next eight months if you want a book club to buy your masterpiece and then we must have the stern, honest, narrow-minded, but broad-minded in his narrow-minded way, Dutch Reformed Church predikant, apartheid-supporting father, seeing his daughter's swollen belly and knowing he is innocent, feeling the shame this has brought on his house. Lead in from here to the outraged father stalking the guilty, coloured author of his daughter's swollen belly, pottering about not two feet from him revising a poem by Yeats he intends to write when he has finished writing Shakespeare's plays. The next five hundred words debating their respective points of view on transubstantiation must show they are both good men, sharing a common anxiety to be rid of the heroine. The father must be unconvinced by the theological arguments of the coloured villain or hero, take your pick, and must shoot this depriver of his natural right to lay his daughter, in a patch of purple prose, the purpler the better. Then have him

stagger the two inches necessary if he is to get the Lord's Prayer out six times, clasping his daughter's swollen belly for leverage as he kicks her up the arse. She, still virginal, for she does still believe all conceptions are immaculate, must stagger, holding her arse and leaving her swollen belly to take care of itself, father was wearing heavy boots, off into the frightening mysterious Veldt that has a tendency to get more mysterious with every book written on it. The epic is now nearing its end. There is now only the final ten thousand words that portray sympathetically yet strongly the wench, retching, the kick up the arse has brought it on, carrying a Glockenspiel on her back, hop, skipping and jumping with the joy of living, all across a Veldt, deserted of all but wild animals on leave from the Kruger National Park, amorous goldminers sleeping off a drunk, and a school of platypi indigenous to Australia. To die bravely, a child hanging from her umbilical cord, half a mile from Goli, city of gold, and five minutes from a bus stop.

The liberal minded will fall over themselves to buy this novel because, being stupid, they will find within it reasons for opposing all who oppose the right of a man to marry whom he wishes if he has chosen a bride with a larger income and a better pedigree. Tory-minded tally-ho-yoicks clots will rush to swell the royalties as reviews, by reviewers who haven't read it, prove that nothing has changed in the last million years and nothing will change in the next, stupidity being an eternal verity. Socialists of the Transport House mould will read different reviews, but reach the same conclusions, as the Tory minded, being Tory minded. The Communists will wait for the imprimatur of the *Daily Worker* and then borrow it from the library so they can be ignored. The author will move

to Montego Bay and the pound notes will shine bright in the old Jamaica night.

It was nice knowing you, Barry, man. I hope it's a long, long time no see.

Wrongs do right themselves if you wait long enough. Seretse Khama did become Regent of his tribe. When Mr. Patrick Gordon Walker reverted to being an opposition M.P. he led a successful agitation to have Seretse Khama restored to that state of grace from which he had removed him. I would very much like to meet Ruth Williams and her husband Seretse Khama. I know I do not feel as strongly about meeting Mr. Patrick Gordon Walker. I do feel strongly about him but not in that way.

Chapter Sixteen

HIS QUEST FOR PROSE LAUREATE status certainly had landed Barry among the strange fruit. A pouf with connections in the literary sub-world had sent an invite to a middle-sexual shindig he was throwing. When there was no Anaconda around to pal up with, he was the next best thing as a faithful friend. There was no burden of his he wouldn't share, particularly the unpleasant ones.

"You'll enjoy yourself," he told me trying a bunco steer.

"I just don't want to meet any more for a while."

"Don't panic man," he said with a grin that started friendly and finished nasty "He only brown studies little nigger boys."

"At dusk all arses are brown," I told him straight-faced. "And the lighting might be bad."

"Is you is or is you aint ?"

"That's two questions"

"Well then, is you is ?"

"That's one question."

"Then give me one answer."

"Let's stay home."

"This invitation is from a queen," he said, and I felt sorry for the poor sod. The voice dripped self hate and self pity. "You can't refuse a royal invitation."

"You can't, but I can."

"Your always bellyaching about how tough their life is."

"I worry about the poor ones only, period."

"Hath not a rich pouf hands ? Doth he not shit as thou shittest ? "

"My quality of mercy strain is out at the laundry."

"I need this bloke."

"I don't."

"I need the pig, Issy, I need him bad."

"There must be better ways than that."

"You wait till you write a book."

"I'll send you a telegram when I do."

"We'll be back to pigeon post then."

"I don't want a row, but I don't want to go."

"Olive says it's O.K."

"Barry, what happens if you lose a trick ? A nervous breakdown ? "

"Is you is."

"All right I is, but I don't want to."

"I'll be round for you at seven."

"I'll just have time to block it with cement."

"Yeah, you do that," he said grinning. A burden was going to be shared with a friend and the profit would be all one way, his way. Barry could spare a grin.

He was back on the dot of seven. My parnassian friend wasn't taking any chances. As Olive was in the kitchen making some tea I asked what kind of louse the host was.

"The kind you like to see laying out on a mortuary slab rigor mortising before the introduction."

"Then for Christ's sake, why the must ? "

"That's my business."

"Pardon me for asking."

"Hold it, she's coming," he said. So I held it. You don't ask a bloke to be what he isn't in my book. Nor do you go into a nunnery when he isn't.

As neither Barry nor I owned a motor car, or the

resources to hire one, the journey to Earls Court Road was made by courtesy of the London Passenger Transport Board Central and Piccadilly lines. If no politician thinks you important enough to loan you his Rolls Royce, this way of getting from A to B has its points; it gets you there in one piece. Of course the writer who lacks imagination, and has to meet commuters to know people, gets a little more out of it than this; he meets commuters. A journey in a crowded tube with you strap-hanging stealing sly peeks at the teenage chicks showing off the flesh is a must for any parnassian who knows he's Walter Pater's sister as a literati. It got me going this time and I'm not even a member of the Pen Club. Those puppy-fat titties pushing out, twitching, deflating, mummy says you can nibble after the wedding, gave the idea for the great English novel. The day senility comes, and I stop counting mammaries as an insomnia cure, I'll write the magnum tripus. While in bed with urethritis, non-venereal in origin if you please, I got out the beginning. When the flow down the tube makes you weep a man has an excuse for starting the great English novel.

"Where's me bleeding dinner? Get that sodding, snotty-nosed brat out from under me bleeding feet." A womb-to-the-tomb subsidised electoral unit was home, deltoids exhausted, from the Labour Exchange, and, sluttish, fag drooping from scabby lower lip, old dutch was copping the load. On second thoughts, this type of proletarian realism needs a Beverley Nichols or Godfrey Winn, not a realist writer. Unless *Woman* or *Woman's Own* commissions me, the novel will not be written.

The neurotic, and that's me officially, needs more than the plain diet of titties and backsides to integrate. I began to watch the sober suits. They ahemed, hurped,

farted, blushed guiltily every time, blew their noses self consciously, opened newspapers, read the headlines, passed what passes for conversation with commuters and stayed dead. When staring had given a crick in the neck I stopped and rubbed my neck. I found it more comfortable not to stare at them while I pondered. "Would I ever scale the social heights enough to play games on a duchess's belly ? "

I belted this about for a bit before I let it drift back into the unconscious it should never have left. Even I could see that no duchess, no matter how senile and stupid would be that hard up in these days when young, willing and more able, Young Woodleys are prepared to give their all for a fee. That though had been the waste of a thought and I'd better be careful, I didn't have that many that were worthwhile. Instead I ordered a useful thought to the surface of my mind and started to work out what kind of social life a woman with a vagina on her cheek would have. The rest of the journey passed quite pleasantly as I visualised her at a Court Ball, curtsyng, wanting to pay a penny, and wanting to scratch.

Lafayette did not say "Earls Court Road, I am here," but I did. There is something for a Freudian to nibble at here, profitably. I know that the area was open country in his day and there was no station, because trains hadn't been invented but it is still something for a Freudian to nibble at, profitably. Exactly why eludes, but then so does why we persist in thinking they contribute anything to anything.

The walk from the station to the flat at which the shindig was being held took ten minutes of medium-speed walking. Passing through S.W.3 streets is preferable to a journey across the Sahara without food or water but only if you read P. C. Wren. The houses

passed added their wealthy widow's mite to the migraine the stroll was giving my ingrowing toe nail. The pavements were filthed with decidedly niffy refuse, fag-ends that bore the lipstick traces, broken matchsticks that didn't, pools of piss drunks had left as a souvenir, dried cloacal clumps horses had left, and used French letters some curates must have ditched. The gutters, Chanel Number Fived with the aroma of composting food scraps, dried snot rags, and the sweat of the unwashed, tight-trousered sloppy Joes, louts loitering in them. The seedy gentility of the men going into their needing-a-coat-of-paint, repairs, and a bomb, houses, with their rounded shoulders, their shambling, pathetic parodies of a stride, the shininess of their jackets at the elbows and the bagginess of their trousers at the knees, appalled pitifully, contemptuously.

The flat we sought lay on the third floor of one of these monuments to the lack of taste that is synonymous with the acquisitive instinct. The walk up the sickness-bespattered, coconut fibre, carpeted stairs would have had a Dorian Gray who appreciates an Adam staircase, doing his nut. As I have never seen an Adam staircase, and not even my best friend would call me a Dorian Gray, I simply remained what I had been before — a *New Statesman and Nation* reader, mildly concerned when a negro gets lynched and demoniacally angry whenever a wealthy homosexual is treated unkindly, I don't think.

Mine host was waiting by the door to greet the guests. He smiled faintly but winsomely showing the twice-a-day evenly brushed, up and down, pearly whites as he shook hands. The incisor on the left needed filling badly but I forebore to mention this. It isn't the sort of thing you tell a pouf to whom you've not yet been introduced. His welcome of Barry was so

cordial I suspected the worst, wrongly Barry swore later. I was not greeted quite so effusively. Actually it was so offhand I got the impression that he did not see me as his future husband. He led Barry into the room whinneying with pleasure. The arm he had round Barry's shoulders and the way it was hugging may have been the reason for the whinney. I followed a little put out. I wasn't black but I hadn't bathed in weeks. I deserved better. A willowy winsome took my coat without asking "may I?" He moved toward the kitchen to dump it, body swaying in a way that would have had Pavlova screaming "Nijinsky, I give you contract." She would have to return from the dead to do this but that sort of thing has happened before, I've read somewhere.

Barry and mine host disappeared as soon as I turned to peep at a clutch of chorus boys. The itch on my belly grew stronger as I restrained the desire to spit. The yearning urnings pushed by without bothering to apologise or say "good evening." I felt as happy as a bug in a dettoled bed. I certainly was the wallflower who had forgotten he had B.O., with that crew. There was still time to win their friendship, the evening was yet young. All I needed to do was slice off my cochones with a razor blade, but I decided not. I can't stand the sight of my own blood.

After I had been standing forlornly in a corner for about ten minutes, a couple of the girls asked "Are you straight or bent?" For a reason I do understand they kept away for the rest of the evening. A tired looking blonde with dark roots then came over to offer friendship and a drink. I took the drink. She then scarpered and I was lonely as a fart in a cloud again. I stayed that way until a tearaway in drainpipes and a black sweater introduced himself. "I'm not one of those,"

he said, "I come along to watch." He dragged me from group to group with such speed I got the stitch and none of the faces I said "hullo" to registered. When he saw that I did not play those games drunk or sober he left me with a gaggle of tortured consciences giving Dat Ole Debbil Colour Bar a one-two in the solar plexus verbally. One, obviously trying to impress with his erudition, asked "How do you feel when you read that indigenous peoples are being enslaved with increasing inhumanity by the Colonial imperialist powers?" "If you translate that one into English, mate, I'll try and answer it," I told him, and for some reason he got huffy. These chairborne leftists with their 'woe is me my black brother is getting it in the cobbles' and 'I've been reading *Everybody's* and got carried on to Crewe make my scrotum itch. All they ever do is patronise the poor devil who is copping it to win their egos some applause. A Quaker, or a Father Huddleston, who feels a genuine sense of kinship with his brothers, you can't help admiring and respecting. You may not agree with their why for doing but you must admire their guts and sincerity. If there wasn't an audience these scum wouldn't help a blind lady across the street. I felt a "balls to you, mate" shaping up and it wasn't my party. I went over to the drinks table and started in to get drunk as quickly as possible. Alcohol is good for you. The characters began to seem more sympathetic as the alcohol content of my blood rose. Even the refined bitches with their shrill, uppah middle voices became bearable. Seen through an alcoholic haze even Auschwitz couldn't have been that bad, if you weren't a prisoner there. Given too many drinks I can make love to Whistler's grandmother on a flying trapeze. I was staying pissed.

The beat of the party started to hot up. The jazz

combo started to beat out some nice, cool jazz. The limbs, more sensible than the bodies they were attached to, worked up to capers that would lead to a rupture, I hoped. The bitches thighs were whirling in front of my eyes. An Eskimo Nell let out a squeal, high, wide, ugly. A character tried for a pass but I wasn't playing. I was the wrong kind of brown study for that, gentleman. I just cannot, pissed or sober, and it's never worried me.

"My name is Hora," the tired blonde with the black roots said.

"Nice to meet you. Mine's Issy Segal."

"I'm drunk. I always get drunk at parties."

"It's a good way to pass the time if someone else is paying."

"Someone always takes me home. I'm good in bed."

"I'm not interested." I was going to be sick if she didn't bugger off. The booze, probably.

"My husband wants me to go on the bash."

"Bugger off, sister," I said. "I don't want to know."

"I'm good in bed."

"I'm not," I said, "so fuck off."

That's just what she did. I stood looking at the way she was crying and it was ugly and real. I wanted to go over, I tell myself often, but I didn't and that's what counts when you reckon it all up. I didn't.

It's two years late, tired looking blonde with the black roots, two years too late, but I've got something to tell you. I'm sorry I didn't see under the hard toughie to the marshmallow kid inside, sorry. I'm sorry I never knew till two years after, sorry. One day Hora, a lot of your kind will flex their muscles and push together. It won't change things much, but maybe the men like your husband will get scared, and drop dead.

The party really was hot now. The faces of the jazz

combo boys glistened with sweat. Males and females, you couldn't tell, were clacking nineteen to the dozen. Males and females, you could tell were winging around in response to the rhythm. A few pathetics in the corner jabbered away Wolfenden past, present and future, their old whorish faces caking as the powder ran down. I could see Barry hitting a nifty shuffle with mine host. My kidneys reminded me that there is a limit to fluid intake without spilling. Getting to the lavatory was a must. It was a shocker. Chipped seat, clogged-up pan, a newspaper cut up for the wiping off, and a pair executing some very private manoeuvres. They went out giggling and went straight back when I left. I could hear the mews of delight as I went down the passage. When I got back into the room the free-for-all that met my eyes had me doubled up. Two star turns were doing their party number. "I saw him first, you beast." "No you didn't." "I'll claw your eyes out." "You manly thing, I hate you." I had to leave or I would have split a blood vessel. Peace was restored when I returned and they were French kissing each other sloppily. I kept a straight face this time. I just felt sick.

The rest of the time was a bit of an anti-climax or maybe I could take it better. That just about wraps up the shindig. I'm glad Barry conned me into going with him. I'd never have seen the painting otherwise. It was a nude painted by a someone who knew his paints and loved the knowing. His brush had caught a buttock reposing, muscles rippling, with the sinuousness of silk. It came at you in thick splashes of colour that warmed. A sensuous Lilith had been caught, held, transmuted by the mastery of an artist's brush. A thick, sexual, savage negress with eyes pouring out a sulky animalism that enthralled, drew, and sickened

pleasurably. The warmth moved into my throat and I felt myself getting bigger looking. The artist had seen deep and the selfishness and vanity had come through clean. This was a woman made to be loved roughly who would betray because she was woman. Should I ever learn who the artist was I should like to write him saying "Thank you, you gave me a wholly worthwhile moment."

Two years have passed since that essay into party-going. Since that time I have seen too many dingy rooms, ornate rooms, tubular-chaired rooms, G-plan bookcase rooms. I have attended too many crumpet laid on bacchanalia. Blue storied at too many stag meets. I'm tired of making the season. A party is only people being people in a way they can't be at home or the office. Just a room, a table, some free booze, people milling, people smelling, people, Christ! Still that evening was the first. I know I was taken because Barry wanted a giggle watching me react. It's no secret that all the guests were mincing, made-up, prawns. But what does, what they are, Barry is, or I am, matter anyway? We're still people and we stink alive, stink dead, stink.

I left for the animal reservation on which I lived by the first workmen's train.

The Epilogue

THE FIRST THING I did after getting out of bed was check on the state of the world according to the *Times* and then decide to kill myself. As I believe that thought has value only as a prelude to action, and live by that, just five minutes ago I swallowed a large number, and this time I'm certain it's a large enough number, of pheno-barbitone tablets. Something, the number probably, tells me that this time I will make the suicide grade. I do hope to stay alive long enough to finish this, the final chapter of the auto-biography that shows the decline and fall of Israel Segal into sanity. I wish to be as responsible a citizen in dying as I have been in life. But, since there are no experts in this field to give a time available assessment, I may have misjudged exactly when death will make striking typewriter keys too difficult. Should this be so, I can only beg the reader's forgiveness for giving him short weight. I do assure him that should this be so, it will be due to causes ardently desired.

As a child I was taught that in the moment of passing into God's presence the gala occasions that distinguish one life from another, rarely, flood the memory. Unless God decides to exist, and proves it by suspending Natural Law, I shall soon know whether there is any truth in this piece of folk lore. As with all people contributing to knowledge, my actual motive is far more idealistic than I will let myself believe. I wish to contribute a "My most unforgettable moment" piece to the *Readers' Digest* after dying. That they

would welcome this must be obvious to any reader of that magazine.

Since I have only recaptured one or two unimportant memories so far, I am beginning to wonder if this piece of folk lore is not a canard. Telephoning the War Office to insist that I be called up immediately was insane, but it was not an event that stands out for remembering when one is dying. Non-certifiable lunatics have insisted on dying for their country out of turn throughout our history as a nation. I am forced to declare, albeit unwilling, for I believe that one must have a mother to be born, that when mine said, "Ven iss der tseit tsi tsarben ullus vuss veir haben gelabt iss gedanken," it was just another of her bloody lies. I am happy that this is so, for if there was no other reason for my committing suicide — and there are plenty — the need to prove for the millionth time that a compulsive liar always lies would justify this suicide to even the most sceptical denier of suicide as a panacea for all human ills.

Like every other day, it really is a glorious day for suicide. All the Cancers are in orbit. Nostrodamus is prognosticating from the grave, and statesmen, having no directives of their own, are following his in ghost-written speeches. A negro is being hunted through the Louisiana bayous, to the orgasmic whelps of the men and dogs enjoying the chase. A Jew is re-living the happiness he has known at Belsen spitting at a photograph of Eichman. To the ersatz howls of a wife who has betrayed him often and the genuine sorrow of the politician who needs his vote, a dormitory suburb nondescript passes from hence to thence upstairs, painfully. Like every other day, it really is a glorious day for suicide.

The permanent, dreamless, free-from-the-strain-of-

being sleep will soon come. Science has proved that if you take a large enough overdose of phenobarbitone tablets you have taken a lethal dose, and problems of status have ended, permanently. Memory must therefore place itself on a pilot automation belt to speed up output while there is still time. It is falling down at this moment, occupying itself with phantasmagoria of no value. This is not permitted to memory in a stable, moral, cash-worshipping society. Memory must, remembering its obligations, proceed to remember faster, faster and faster.

God has been good to his sinful son. Memory is now flooding being. I have judged my mother unjustly for the first time. The thirteen-year-old, nervously happy, is standing in the place allotted, ready to play his part in the ritual that will transform child to man, Jewish version. The ceremony has been arranged by Caftaned Elders of Zion in greasy black coats and dank beards whom the child detests. The suit, socks, coat, vest, shirt and underpants have been donated to the child about to become a man by some kindly ladies who, aware that charity is the giving to the poor a little of what they have no need for, are always charitable. The skin I was wearing was my own. Everybody in a democracy, irrespective of his class, religion or colour, is born with one of his own. It is this that distinguishes democracy from dictatorship, irrefutably.

If you can tolerate Cecil B. de Mille epics — and I cannot — the ceremony may be found impressive. It has the stupidity of tradition, the hypocrisy of orthodoxy, the phoney wailing of the people who care only for profit, and the nausea it gives. In retrospect, it seems just another bit of Hebraic ritual justifying the need for assimilation — and the disappearance of

the ritual. But this is to see with the clarity of the adult who is dying. At thirteen, one knows bugger-all and believes what one's elders tell one to believe. At the ceremony I bowed to the left, genuflected to the right, read my portion of the scroll allotted, bowed to the applause, and thought what big tits the girl in the third row had, quite happily. It took just five minutes of mumbo jumbo to make me an adult before I had grown up to the status. I could now have short-time knee-tremblers with blousy bints for money, just as I now did. But it would be different, kosher by the Beth Din different. I was now a man. Only eight more years and I could vote. The Lord is good to his chosen children.

Man is such a bloody stupid animal. When he's dying he compounds the stupidity and becomes bleeding comic with it as well. He never seems to know what is best and will persist in struggling to live while dying. Taking this next step forward in evolution seems to frighten him, for reasons I can't understand. I should have thought that, considering he only uses life to piss, shit, fart, and produce smaller models of himself, death would be a welcome release from the body contortions these activities demand. That the by-products of these acts have some sort of value, I know, but surely science, omniscient, omnipotent, could produce them more cheaply and save our intestines, ureters and sexual organs unnecessary strain and unnecessary life.

As the message that makes my death worthwhile comes through, I feel myself being lifted by unseen hands into the Presence. I can see God clearly. He is dealing himself a royal flush. God can do this without cheating. He is God the Father, God the Son, God the fake dealer of cooked hands. The message floods, being

loud, clear, urgent, meaningless. I can feel it within, pounding my mind, seeking exit. Hear me now, world, hear me ! Listen to my message, for it matters, being meaningless. Is your grandmother a necrophiliac ? Does your water run upwards in cascades ? Won't your best friends tell you that you stink ? Do you dream while masturbating of a world never to be ? Then buy this message with a moment of listening. It is the universal panacea for all the ills that afflict men being meaningless. "Marlowe wrote Bacon. Bacon wrote Marlowe." Remember this always, live by this always, and let me die happy, knowing that in my last moments I thought of my brothers and their needs.

The fingers grow tired. The body is preparing to cease to be. This knowing that soon death will come is good, making all things clean. Despite the fear, the hire-purchase debts, and the money in the bank, the final curtain has begun to drop. Thank God for His infinite mercy to this poor sinner. It has become hard to keep my eyes steady. They seem to have grown a tiredness of their own that demands sleep—permanent, dreamless sleep in its own right. Glad when it comes . . . glad. World is place tortures, corrupts, tortured, corrupt. Which is us all. Can feel it now all over. Warm tiredness stealing all over. Good. Soon dead. Feel it enveloping. Nice feeling. Knowing soon sleep always. Free disgust, pain — sleep soon for always. Soon lay me down. Important have epitaph. Last message . . . hate feel for people. Must have . . . must. Give meaning me. Type epitaph before die . . . must get down . . . important. Will . . . must . . .

"Sleep, little Isselle, sleep,

The bleep you hear is only a nuclear warhead
in the sky.

Sleep, little Isselle, sleep,
People will sing you a mescaline lullaby."
Got down . . . ready . . . Ba . . .

The writer, finger pressing a typewriter key, was found dead at 3.47 p.m. on August 6th, 1962. The coroner found the cause of death to be a compulsive desire to die, expedited by an overdose of phenobarbitone, taken in a moment of sanity. Those who knew this man disliked him. Those to whom he was a stranger loved him. Israel Segal was a compassionate man who hated all men who lived, enjoying living. He died as he had lived — giving nothing, taking nothing. Requiescat in pace, weak, tortured, despairing man.

THE END



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